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HOW TO JUDGE A BOOK

BY EDWIN L. SHUMAN

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HOW TO JUDGE A BOOK

A Handy Method of Criticism for the General Reader

By

EDWIN L. SHUMAN

Literary Editor of the Chicago Record-Herald; Author of "Practical Journalism," etc.

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TO MY

FATHER AND MOTHER

Schumann

Sept. 12 '41

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PREFACE

In this volume I have tried to formulate a simple, home-made system of criticism, yet one based on the highest standards, by means of which the ordinary reader may judge for himself as to the real merits of the latest popular novel — or of any other book. The object is to help the average serious-minded woman or man, young or old, to get his share of the best books — within the limits of his own taste — from library shelves and from the motley new thousands that pour yearly from the presses.

Academic critics in each succeeding age go on parroting the trite dictum that literary genius is of the past, that old books alone are worth reading. They said the same thing while Dickens and George Eliot were writing; they said it while the novels of Meredith, Hardy, and Stevenson were coming out, and they are repeating it in one key or another to-day. It may as well be confessed at once that I am with the vulgar majority in believing that even the age we live

in may produce a few books worth reading. The problem is to find them, and, "when found, make a note of."

It is believed that the present volume differs from others on the choice of books in this: that it seeks to respect the right of every individual to shape his reading primarily by his own tastes rather than by the dictates of any other man's taste, however enlightened. Thus, in view of the strong popular preference for fiction, most of the chapters have been devoted to that class of literature. Special attention has been given to analyzing the novel, quality by quality, and furnishing test questions by which each of its aspects may be judged.

The constant aim has been to make every man his own literary critic, to furnish easy standards, both objective and subjective, by which he may distinguish between the best and the worst, the good and the less good, with a view to the intelligent formation of sound standards within the boundaries of his existing taste. It is hoped that the chapter on the short story may be of value in this respect to the innumerable army of magazine-readers.

I have tried to make the book of practical value to many different groups of readers, — to teachers, librarians, preachers, college students, reading circles, women's clubs, reviewers, story-writers, and to the great home-culture army, young and old, whose earnest recruits are seeking to get something more than the moment's entertainment out of the books they read. Reading itself may easily become a form of mere mental laziness; this book is for those who are not content with that kind of reading. An experience of twenty years in writing about books has convinced me that the more one knows about the subtle and beautiful laws of literary art, the greater is the enjoyment to be had from one's hours with authors. This little treatise, therefore, seeks not only to help the average reader in his choice of books, but to multiply and deepen the pleasures of all his reading.

While the main principles employed are as old as criticism itself, it is believed that the treatment of many points is more or less new. At any rate, a large share of the volume is drawn from original observation and experience. Where apt statements are borrowed from other sources they

usually are credited on the spot; but in a general way I am indebted to nearly every volume of a critical nature that has come to my hand in the last decade, and it would be obviously impossible to specify all of these. The methods of all three dominant schools of criticism — scientific, academic, and impressionist — have been drawn upon to a certain extent in formulating the eclectic method here set forth, harking back always, however, to the masterpieces and the ideals that they furnish. It is hoped that the book may meet the needs of the intelligent "general reader," who, while reading what he can understand and enjoy, desires at the same time to be enlarging his taste for genuine literature — "the best that has been known and thought in the world."

E. L. S.

Evanston, Ill., Sept. 1, 1910.

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HOW TO JUDGE A BOOK

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I

GENERAL STANDARDS

A GOOD but illiterate woman, who had raised a large family and seen many joys and sorrows, happened one day to hear of a novel that dealt with real life. "What!" she exclaimed, "have they written a book about it?" That is just the trouble: they are writing thousands of books about it yearly, though few of the books have enough real life in them to outlast the year. How can we distinguish the good ones from the poor ones? What is a good book, anyhow?

The man who first led a horse to water made a famous discovery, and so did the first critic who tried to make the general public read literature for which it had no taste. Perhaps, after all, the horse and the people are right. Why should I read what does not interest me in the least, even though a wise man has praised it? What everybody wants is a chance at the books

that combine present interest and lasting value. These books will be different for different people — a fact overlooked by those who insist on leading us all to the same Pierian spring.

It will be taken for granted throughout this volume that the first thing you have a right to ask of any literary work is that it shall interest you — shall give you some kind of pleasure. The next step is to test the quality of that pleasure, to see whether or not it is the best obtainable for the time and effort. If you have enjoyed a certain book, has the pleasure been so fine that you are willing to read the same volume a second or third time? This is one of the simplest tests of literary value. Another is to ask whether the book is one of the kind that can be enjoyed by the majority of educated people of good taste. Finally, we may analyze the work itself, and see whether or not it contains the intellectual, emotional, and artistic qualities that have made other books of the same class live for years and years.

These tests represent the three most important ways of judging a book, — by the impression it makes on yourself, by accepting the verdict of expert authority, and by dissecting and weighing

the objective qualities of the book itself. They also represent three distinct schools of criticism, each of which has its fighting champions. Each of these schools claims everything in sight, for its methods alone; but all three are alike — though they may not admit it — in using for their measuring rods certain ideal standards drawn from old-established literature that has stood the test of time.

Canon Ainger tells of one of John Leech's youngsters who was heard confiding to another boy the heretical belief that Shakespeare was n't good for much. In this young critic's opinion "The Swiss Family Robinson" had "Hamlet" beaten by a thousand miles. Stevenson came across an honest man who was not ashamed to have it known that he ranked Ouida above Homer in every respect. I recently heard of a lad who acted as unofficial taster for all the boys in his town, and who, for some reason, — perhaps too much adult laudation, — took a dislike to "Treasure Island" and pronounced it "an awful yarn," thereby causing John Silver and the terrible Pew to languish in lonely neglect on the public-library shelves.

If we could get equally honest and self-confident opinions from the great mass of American readers to-day, the verdict probably would show more votes for "David Harum" or some other "best seller" of the hour than for "Paradise Lost" or "Henry Esmond." Is the popular novel of the hour, therefore, the greater piece of literature? Evidently something more than a majority vote of a democracy is needed here, in spite of Tolstoy's contention to the contrary in his treatise on "What Is Art?"

"Let us love the books that please us," says Jules Lemaître, the foremost living critic of France, "and cease to trouble ourselves about classifications and schools of literature." Here speaks the subjective school, which depends, like John Leech's boy, on its own impressions, saying: "I like this or that book; if you don't, you may keep your opinion, and I'll keep mine." This sounds delightfully liberal, but, as we have already seen, it leads to chaos in matters of taste. On the other hand, the late Ferdinand Brunetière was wont to say: "The first condition of criticism is never to follow one's own tastes. In literature we must distrust the thing that gives us

pleasure." This is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the objective or scientific method, which undertakes to judge books as a chemist assays metals, by weighing and measuring the constituent qualities themselves, never the effects of those qualities upon our emotions. As the gentle Amiel remarked, this cold intellectual method would give us "a poetry skinned and dissected by science."

Confronting both of these modern extremes is the ancient and aristocratic school that says: "Only a majority vote of the cultured few can say whether a book is good or bad, and — ahem! — we are the cultured few." This sounds very authoritative, especially when buttressed by an exclusive claim of all the classics. But where do these autocratic gentlemen get their authority? Was it not some of them who, sticking to their traditional standards, derided "The Eve of St. Agnes" when it first appeared, going ludicrously astray in their estimate of the noble lines in which Keats achieved

> The great end
> Of poesy, that it should be a friend
> To soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of men?

The simple fact is, that there is no such thing as an exact science of criticism. No method is infallible. Only time and the collective taste of all classes of men and women can sift out the works of genius with certainty. Yet each of the three methods just mentioned has something useful to suggest. Professor Trent is right when he declares for neither a democracy nor an aristocracy of letters, but for a constitutional republic. The modern reading world is made up of many diverse groups, each of which must approach the delectable land of pure literature in its own way. Each group or class has rights which the others are bound to respect. The best book for the wise is seldom the best for the ignorant. Youth desires action, sentiment, color, and youth does well to rejoice in "The Three Guardsmen" and "Reveries of a Bachelor." Middle age prefers intellectual struggle, the white light of realism, psychological analysis; and middle age does well to choose the grim strength of "Anna Karénina," the subtle insight of "The Egoist," or the unimpassioned sweep of Gibbon's great history of Rome. Old age finds pleasure in reflection rather than in action, in philosophy

rather than in romance; hence elderly readers may prefer Marcus Aurelius, Herbert Spencer, the evergreen sermons of Robertson, or the rich ironies of "Don Quixote." To impose the tastes and standards of one of these groups upon the others would be pedantic and useless. It is the aim of the present volume to offer a series of easy tests that shall be flexible enough to serve in turn each taste and class.

It will help to clear the atmosphere if we begin by noticing that all books making any pretensions to be ranked as literature may be divided roughly into two classes, — those which are read by everybody for a little while and then die and are forgotten, and those which are read by somebody forever. We can easily agree that the long-lived books are of a higher order than the others. It is worth while to note, too, that when you read the popular novel of the hour you soon forget its characters and scenes, while those of the higher grade of novels may live in the memory, as familiar friends, for a lifetime. You can find pleasure in reading "David Copperfield" over and over again. It has a depth and a vitality that never wear out. Here, then, is one general

law by which literary greatness may be measured: —

The greatest art is that which gives the most lasting pleasure to the largest number of people.

Since we all wish to get as much pleasure and benefit as possible from books, shall we hold ourselves bound to read only those of supreme merit under the foregoing law? Shall we, like Mrs. Blimber, dwell all our days with Cicero in Tusculum? Certainly not, unless we desire the fate of little Paul Dombey, who died prematurely, or of the unfortunate Mr. Toots, who, when he began having whiskers, left off having brains. The forcing process does nothing but harm.

For little children the natural introduction to good literature is through simple works of universal appeal, such as Bible tales, legendary history, fairy tales, and the like. These interest the child because they appeal to his imagination and can be understood without study or experience. Children on the threshold of the 'teens can get most enjoyment and benefit from poetry such as Longfellow's, which is simple, sincere, full of moral inspiration, and from juvenile tales about children a trifle older than themselves, such as

Miss Alcott and some of her successors have written. For young men and women who have not had much schooling, the natural approach to the higher things of literature is through well-written romances of adventure or sentiment. For the adult reader of limited education, it is usually through the popular novel of the hour, or through the lighter kind of historical novels, opening up the way for Scott, and later for books requiring study and intellectual growth for their enjoyment.

In matters of art, as of life, the secret of interest is knowledge. The only wise and effective approach to the treasures of literature is through the joys of the things we already know and understand.

We come here upon a question of the reader's personality, which is almost as important as that of the book's own qualities. When a ray of white sunlight enters a smoky factory window, it becomes a dull drab spot on the floor; whereas, if it passes through a richly colored cathedral window, it may be changed to crimson and gold. A similar change takes place in the author's ideas and imagery when these pass through the

reader's personality on the way to his consciousness, so that the book you have enjoyed may be widely different from that which I have enjoyed, though we have read the same pages. The secret of the difference lies in our diverse tastes, experiences, and ideals. Each of us can grasp only so much of a book's treasures as each is fitted by depth of knowledge to comprehend. Without the key of knowledge that creates personal interest, it is useless to read any book.

When I was a boy I made a conscientious effort to read "Pendennis," wading through chapter after chapter that seemed to me as dull as the "begats" of Genesis. Finally I flung it aside as a meaningless book; and such it was, for me, in that stage of development. Years later, when I had experienced the emotions and struggles of young manhood, I opened the book again and found that lovable and provoking young buck, Mr. Arthur Pendennis, a wellspring of delight.

The function of art is not to tell us new things, as science does, but to interpret and illumine what we have already stored in our minds and hearts. The crude and meagre soul, fed on back-

yard gossip and sensational newspapers, can find pleasure only in the simpler or meaner forms of art. For a shallow mind, a shallow book. The deeper and richer works yield up their wealth only to the cultured spirit. There are certain universal books, however, such as the Bible, or Homer's epics, or "Don Quixote," that have something to offer alike to the boy and to the old man, to the peasant and to the sage. But the great majority of books, even of the best, appeal only to certain ages, moods, tastes, or stages of mental and spiritual development. The problem is to find the good books that really belong to you, in your present phase, and the most elementary sign by which you may recognize them is that of interest.

If, after an honest trial, a book fails to interest you, you may be sure that, while it may be the best of books for other people, it is not for you — at least, not yet. It was a perfectly normal boy who bewailed the way good stories were spoiled "by putting in girls, so you have to skip such lots." Girls and things that get in a fellow's way before he is old enough to be interested in them must expect to be skipped. When a book does

interest you, however, the quality of that interest should be tested by one or all of the three methods already mentioned. So far as the scientific-objective method is of use to the average reader, it may be reduced to some such test question as this: —

Does the book contain enough truth, beauty, or active good to make it worth my while?

To be really great a literary work must have a great idea at the heart of it as well as a beautiful vesture of language about it. It must have a meaning that connects it with our life, not tagged on the outside in sermonizing platitudes, but woven into the living warp and woof of it, so that the reader feels its significance in his heart as well as knows it in his head. The greatness of Hugo's "Les Misérables" lies largely in the superb power with which it makes you feel the injustice done to Jean Valjean. That romance puts the pathetic truth into the form of a living, brave, magnetic man, whose sufferings move us in a way we never can forget. Every great book has a central idea of this kind, which, in the case of fiction or poetry, the author transmits to us in the form of

emotion; and by judging the nature of this emotion we may judge the book itself, thus applying the subjective or impressionistic test — stated with singular aptness by Mr. J. N. Larned in this question: —

Does the book leave any kind of wholesome or fine feeling in the mind of one who reads it?

Finally, there is the old, orthodox, classical standard for measuring books — the standard of scholarly authority based on the literature that has survived for generations or centuries. It is narrow, this standard of the academic critics, but it is the highest and most nearly trustworthy, and upon it we shall most largely depend in the following chapters, drawing our principles as far as possible from accepted masterpieces. Yet classicism faces toward the past; to be ruled slavishly by established forms would be to miss the value of new forms and to forego all progress in art.

The best way to judge books, then, is to begin confidently with one's own individual impressions, but to keep correcting these by frequent reading of established masterpieces and by comparison

with the verdicts of broad-minded contemporary critics. If a book will not tempt you to a second reading, the indication is that it will not live very long and is not great literature. When you hear of a book that other people have been reading over and over again for a decade or a generation, you may know that it is the genuine article. Whatever your personal merits and mine, — and let us modestly admit that they are considerable, — we may secretly be sure that we are dreadfully like other people, and that books which have given pleasure and inspiration to large numbers of men and women in the past have also a wealth of enjoyment locked up in them for us against that day when life shall have taught us the open sesame of their treasure-house. Therefore, we may safely borrow from the classical critics some such searching test question as this: —

How does the book I am judging measure up, feature by feature, quality by quality, alongside of the finest works of the same sort that have stood the test of time?

I believe that the reader who conscientiously applies the four general tests which I have itali-

cized, seeking always to read the best within the range of his own taste, may safely be left to read what he likes and to approach the finer books by way of the less fine.

II

FIRST STEPS IN ANALYSIS

Most books, like most people, are partly good and partly not so good as they might be; our estimate of them must depend upon the preponderance of the one quality or the other. In order to know the good art from the bad, we must take a book to pieces and look at its component parts and qualities, testing these by certain ideals that serve the intelligent critic as standards of judgment.

All criticism involves comparison. The man in the street uses it — in a vague and useless form — when he asserts that Napoleon was a greater man than Shakespeare, or that "Vanity Fair" is a finer book than Boswell's "Life of Johnson." He is comparing things that are widely different; he might as well say that a sunset is more beautiful than a cathedral. This hazy inaccuracy of thought is the vital defect in the average untrained person's criticism, making it to be more often worthless than otherwise.

We must get hold of more analytical and definite methods. Let us see what elements go to the making of literature of any kind, and learn to measure these separately as well as in combination.

Strictly speaking, literature is limited to those writings that have beauty of some kind in them, — that aim at artistic symmetry, — that give æsthetic pleasure or stir the nobler emotions of the reader. This definition includes only poetry and artistic prose, such as good fiction, dramas, essays, printed orations, and those works of biography, history, travel, etc., that can show any graces of style.

Literature draws its materials from life and seeks to represent life, but the great author does his work by means of selection and illusion, not by wholesale photography. He picks out certain significant phases, characters, traits, emotions, events, or truths, from life, breathes on them with the breath of creative imagination, and arranges them in a little world of their own, every part of which has artistic relations with every other part. This little world, when it comes to us in the form of a book, must create in us an illusion

of life seen with our own eyes, and it must be judged — under its own laws — by its degree of beauty and significance.

Behind every literary product lies an idea, a concept, which the author has tried to put into visible form. Under the spell of his words the reader should feel and see this concept as clearly as he sees, framed in his own window, the outline of a cottage across the street. So it is fair to begin by asking: What was the author's idea? What has he tried to do? For instance, what has Daniel Defoe tried to do in "Robinson Crusoe"? His idea was to depict the adventures and emotions of a likable man cast alone on a tropical island, and to do it so plausibly and vividly that the reader shall be fascinated by their human interest.

Treading close upon the heels of the first question come three others: What degree of success has the author had in putting his idea into artistic form? Was his little world worth creating? How does the book rank with others of its kind? The answers to these queries are true literary criticism.

One of the first steps toward analysis is to learn to distinguish between the author's materials

and his manner of presenting them — that is, between content and form. The author's concept may be compared to a fine silk gown that exists, as yet, only in the imagination of the modiste. The theme or matter of the book corresponds to the bolt of goods out of which the garment is cut. The portion of the original piece of silk retained in the finished gown corresponds to the "content" of the book. The author's grace of construction and of style may be likened to the beauty of the dress-pattern and the artistic workmanship of the seamstress. If the finished garment, viewed as a whole, has perfect-fitting grace of line and harmony of color and ornament, it possesses the vital artistic quality of unity.

Thus the beauty of a book or a gown may lie partly in the original materials, partly in the way the portions are arranged and put together, and partly in the trimming or other ornamentation that may be added in the process of creation. In so far as these added graces of workmanship can be distinguished from the "content," they constitute "style."

But style in literature is merged in a deeper quality called spirit — the author's attitude

toward life, toward everything he touches. Sometimes the ordinary reader feels the lovability of a fine spirit in spite of defects of form, when the learned critics, whose rules it has eluded, cannot understand what has won the popular heart. It is this element in Dickens's works that helps to make them great in spite of frequent artistic defects.

Matter usually is more important than manner, the thing said than the way of saying it; but both are of vital value, and in poetry and some of the lighter forms of prose the form may count for more than the content. You read Poe's "The Raven," not for the wisdom it conveys, but for the music of its lines, or the mood it creates. You read Holmes's "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table," not for its thought so much as for its rippling humor and whimsical fancies. And you feel, do you not, that the spirit of the one is vastly different from that of the other?

In order to tell why we approve or disapprove of a book, we must lay hold of certain ideals of form, content, and spirit, which have become established principles of literary art. These principles take on tangible form in the laws of gram-

mar, rhetoric, logic, construction, æsthetics, and truth in some of its larger aspects. Let us see if we can get at some of these underlying principles.

When you have got fairly into or through a book, pause and see how it answers the test of these three questions: —

Is its *matter* essentially true, well chosen, worth while?

Is its *form* pleasing and in conformity with the laws of literary art?

Is its *spirit* sincere, attractive, touched with any fine feeling?

These compound questions may be subdivided into others that are more technical and definite, such as these: —

As to Content

Is the matter chosen by the author worth presenting in any form?

Does it interest you? Will it interest those for whom the book was intended?

Has it been sifted and condensed, so as to exclude all that is irrelevant and therefore dull?

Is it in any way original, so that it gives a fresh fillip to your thinking?

If the book is a novel, do the characters represent human nature truly? Does the psychology of their acts ring true? Is there any new light on the workings of the human mind and heart?

Does the plot show unusual powers of invention? Is the action probable? Does the story hold you?

Has the author creative imagination? Does he conjure up living, unforgettable persons and pictures before the eye? Does he produce a sense of reality, of life, of complex life?

As to Form

Has the writing a live man in it? Is it illumined by fancy, by freshness of imagery, by wit, humor, piquancy of phrase? (Style.)

Are the materials presented in artistic order and sequence, according to the laws of beauty? (Æsthetics.)

Is the language correct? Are the sentences and parts of speech all right? (Grammar.)

Is the diction graceful, clear, forceful, free of empty splurge? (Rhetoric.)

Is the argument valid and logical? Is there an adequate cause for every effect? (Logic.)

If it is poetry, are the laws of versification observed? (Prosody.)

Whether prose or verse, does it sound well when read aloud? (Verbal harmony.)

If it is fiction, are the events and ideas presented with proper narrative art, so as to keep you always interested in what is coming next, and producing in the end an impression of unity? (Construction.)

As to Spirit

Is the author putting his heart into his work, or merely maintaining a pose?

If sincere, does he show temperance, justice, and self-restraint in his appeal to your emotions?

If the book stirs you, does it do so by picturing life truly, or by sensational and melodramatic exaggerations?

Is it suffused by a glow of sentiment that makes you feel more kindly toward the people around you in real life?

Does the book reveal a magnetic or a repellent personality, a broad or bigoted philosophy, a religion of hope or despair, an attitude of selfishness or of sympathy?

Does the ultimate message of the book conform with the essential moral laws? Is its inmost spirit one of good-will to men?

Does the work leave a sense of completeness and satisfaction after you have finished it?

These are some of the fundamental questions of all literary criticism, and any book may be tested by a majority of them. In so far as it measures up to the ideals thus indicated, it is true literature.

Notice that the questions relating to form and content deal mainly with qualities in the book itself, looked at outside of ourselves; while those relating to spirit deal with the more elusive qualities, which we have to judge by their emotional effects on our inmost selves. The external or objective data, when we can get at them, are the more stable; but the subjective, when caught on the sensitive retina of a cultured soul, are the deeper and more searching. All three sets of questions are worth studying carefully, so that they may be applied almost instinctively to every book you read.

Let us see, for instance, how George Eliot's

"Romola" stands up under such an inquisition. Is the matter all worth presenting? Yes, there is nothing trivial in "Romola." But is it all interesting to the average intelligent novel-reader? No; it is somewhat overloaded with philosophical and historical matter that belongs to an antiquarian treatise rather than to a novel. But even this is original — in the sense that it has been dug out of "source-books." How about the fitness of all the materials for producing an impression of unity? Well, there is no objection on that score — yet, wait a moment! I object to the highly romantic wanderings of Romola at the end: they are interesting, but not in harmony with the realistic spirit of the main tragedy. The imagination is vivid, the characters are alive, full of human nature, well drawn, even memorable; the action is interesting and full of dignity and meaning. Yes, the book holds me in spite of its dull pages.

The questions as to grammar, rhetoric, logic, and the rest leave "Romola" almost unscathed. The sequence of cause and effect is perfect. The psychology of the story is almost flawless, while the working of the moral law, as usual in George

Eliot, is absolute. On the score of æsthetics, the only charge we bring is a certain heaviness of manner, akin to that of the materials. There is some play of fancy, however, some humor, not a little piquancy of phrase, a great deal of sound thought, often expressed in happy epigrams.

Is the spirit of "Romola" sincere? Absolutely. Throughout the book one can imagine the author saying: "Here I am not merely amusing myself; here, honestly and heartily admitted, you may find the things that life has taught me." The emotional appeal is self-restrained and genuine. The author's view of life is that of one who believes that the wage of sin is death, yet she believes equally that virtue has its sure reward. Her view of things is tonic, not cynical or gloomy. One feels behind the book a magnetic, broad-minded, deeply conscientious personality. It leaves the sense of completeness and satisfaction, that testifies to a book's unity and soundness of spirit.

On the whole, then, "Romola" is a great novel — one which, in spite of its faults, one would n't mind being condemned to read again.

How many of the popular novels of the hour

will stand the same test? Try it on the latest one you have read.

When a person of uncultured taste walks through a picture gallery, it is the gayest-colored canvas that first attracts him — unless, indeed, he be like two boys of my acquaintance, who were found racing at breakneck speed through the room of choicest paintings at the World's Columbian Exposition. When asked the reason for their haste, they explained: "There's nothin' here but pictures; we're goin' to Hagenbeck's circus." When the untrained reader enters the enchanted land of letters, his natural taste — or lack of it — leads him, as it does the red Indian, straight to the more garish colors. He passes by the finely wrought novel of character to waste his time upon some crude and bloody melodrama. Or, changing the pronoun, she prefers some mawkish tale of sentimentality, in which the emotional coloring is as false and impossible as if it had been written on Old Sleuth's recipe for action: "At least one thrill to every thousand words."

This poor stuff may be the best that a crude taste can enjoy, but its quality as art is shown

plainly enough by the fact that it never lives long; it has no lasting attraction, even for those who are temporarily deceived by it. Jane Austen's quiet novels, with never a loud word or a heightened heart-beat, live a century, while a thousand overcolored romances lapse into oblivion before our eyes. Beware of the author who habitually "frightens the evening sky into violent photo-lithographic tints." If a woman dresses in crude and overemphasized colors you say she is "loud," and you prefer the one whose gowns are of neutral and harmonious tints, revealing her refinement and elegance. Much the same test applies to novels.

Here is one of Mrs. Humphry Ward's, say "The Marriage of William Ashe." It is rather gray in its tones, a trifle cold, burdened somewhat with intellectual freight, but its art is chaste, its characters alive, its psychology sound, its action true and often beautiful. You do not like it? And you do like this story by Marie Corelli, in which an impossible figure, meant to represent Christ come back to earth, rants in an impossible style over the defects of the modern church? Well, your preference is quite natural. The novel is one of

the most crudely colored that ever got among the "best sellers." Look at it again. Though it may be sincere in spirit, the style is inflated, the action melodramatic, the emotion frenzied, and the characters do not talk or act like real people. If Miss Corelli's novels did one half the violence to moral laws that they do to the laws of art, her readers would turn away in horror; which is only another way of saying that in England and America the average person's moral standards are higher than his literary standards.

Evil and good are as inseparable in life as a man and his shadow, and both must play their part in literature. There can be no picture and no story without some shadow in it, but we are justified in disliking a story in which all the characters are unpleasant, and in refusing to read one in which the whole world is painted black. This is simply another form of overcoloring, though good artists at times are guilty of it. A man like Ian Maclaren will dip into Scotch life and bring forth the gentle humor and pathos of "Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush," with a noble doctor of the old school as a typical character; while Maxim Gorky will dip into Russian life and produce a

hideous nightmare such as "The Spy," portraying a human welter of cowardly, drunken, suspicious, wholly contemptible characters, an inferno of skulking deceivers and silly deceived, running to and fro in a dim mephitic gloom of besotted ignorance. There are those who will tell you that Gorky's "The Spy" is greater than "Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush." Do not believe it. There must be beauty of content as well as of form.

Literary beauty may take on an infinite variety of forms, ranging from the stately grandeur of great imaginative creations, such as Dante's "Divine Comedy" or Shakespeare's "King Lear," to the little flowers of fancy with which Stevenson and Howells decorate their essays. In our day the imaginative creation of character, — the portrayal of complex human nature in its relations with a complex society, — so long as the humanity portrayed is not wholly base and contemptible, is the author's greatest achievement. To couple this creative power with the depicting of a dramatic scene that thrills in the memory ever afterward — this, too, is a doing of genius. Who can forget the scene in which Becky Sharp's

husband finds her with Lord Steyne? Pure love well portrayed also is eternally beautiful, fulfilling Charles Dudley Warner's dictum that "literature must have in it something of the enduring and the universal." Wit, humor, and pathos always are legal tender, as are self-sacrifice, courage, the attainment of happiness through trial nobly endured. But it is only when such beautiful materials, thrown into relief against some of the darker aspects of life, are fused by a strong creative imagination into living characters and scenes, that we have the highest literary art.

III

THE PLOT OF A NOVEL

FICTION is the most complicated of all literary forms, and therefore, quite naturally, you are impatient to begin with it — just as the young actor modestly wishes to begin his career by playing Hamlet. Well, so be it. Since the majority of people are more interested in fiction than in any other kind of writing (except a bank check), let us begin by taking the novel to pieces, examining the parts, and trying to see what makes the wheels go 'round. To a considerable extent such an analysis will apply to the short story as well.

Every complete novel may be regarded as being made up of at least six elements; namely, characters, action, plot, setting, style, spirit. In due time we shall look at each of these separately, measuring it by the ideal qualities it should possess, and noting the methods or technique of the author in creating the parts and putting them together. It will be understood, of course,

that we are arbitrarily pulling apart the warp and woof of the tapestry, for the moment ignoring the most important thing of all, the joining together of the parts into a harmonious whole.

Of the six elements I have named, the most important are the characters and action, for without these there can be no story. A story is a narrative of things in movement — a moving picture of characters in process of doing or becoming something by reason of their own action and reaction upon each other. The essence of story is change in human relations. The portrayal of character without action of any kind would be mere description, which is much less interesting than narrative. The objection to Henry James's later novels is that they smother the action in a mass of detail — that they sometimes devote a hundred pages to a minute description of the characters and their states of mind without any perceptible change of the *status quo*.

Each art has its special province, outside of which it at once becomes inferior to the art whose domain it has invaded. A great sculptor can show us the rounded grace of the human form in a Venus or an Apollo more effectively than it could be

shown in the most eloquent description ever penned. The painter's special province is color, and beside his glowing canvas the finest "word-painting" in the world seems tame. To the drama, working through living actors on the stage, belongs the portraying of a certain kind of action — the kind that makes one feel, every moment, that something is going to happen. The novelist borrows some of the methods of the drama and some of those of the painter, but his own natural instrument is narrative, and his undisputed domain is that of revealing human character by narrating things done and said. Having a wider liberty, both in methods and in materials, than the dramatist, he can show us more sides of human nature, more phases of our mental and moral make-up, more of the inner workings of the mind and heart, than could ever be put upon the stage.

Fiction alone could give us a Jean Valjean and all his story. It is as if Victor Hugo had taken Michael Angelo's colossal statue of the young David, given it the emotional depth of years and suffering; let us see and feel the joys, sorrows, and struggles that have made the man what he is, and at the same time thrilled us with the dramatic

narrative of the adventures through which he passes before our eyes. At the very outset the author creates in us a sympathy for Jean Valjean which no statue or picture could have aroused, while no stage could present more than an outline of the main incidents in the action. We know the characters better when we get through than we could by means of any other form of art.

There are two general plans on which a novel may be constructed, — the dramatic and the epic; the one shaping all events toward a dramatic climax, the other arranging them more in the order in which they would naturally happen in a man's life. The latter, indeed, might be called the biographical method, though it was originally borrowed from the epic poets.

The simpler and looser epic method was first applied to the modern novel by Fielding, and his example has been followed by Thackeray, Scott, Dickens (usually), and nearly all the romantic writers of our own day. George Eliot tended more toward the dramatic plot, while Wilkie Collins and Bulwer-Lytton used that kind of plot in its most elaborate form. French novelists as a rule would scorn to use any but the dramatic method.

They adopted it away back in the days of Corneille and Racine, and, like the tramp who once tried a piece of soap, they have used no other since.

Perhaps the ideal novel is one that combines the dramatic and epic methods in such a way as to create both kinds of interest, as do "Vanity Fair" and "David Copperfield," so that you remember certain great scenes almost as vividly as the great characters. In "David Copperfield" the form is frankly that of an autobiography of the hero; and while you are interested in the successive incidents, you are most deeply and sympathetically concerned with David himself, with Little Em'ly, with Mr. Peggotty, with Steerforth. When both kinds of interest come together, the effect is deepened. Note how Steerforth, for instance, remains forever in the memory as he lies at last on the beach, his head resting on his arm, where the waves have thrown him. The great advantage of this type of story is that it can cut loose from some of the exactions of the dramatic plot, and can make its characters act more freely and naturally, thus rendering them more alive, more unforgettable. The disadvantage is that

we must give up some of the thrills of dramatic action.

Action, even in the most closely-knit story, may be divided more or less definitely into incidents, episodes, and situations. These, like beads, may be separate, or may be arranged neatly on a string — the thread of the plot. More exactly, plot may be defined as the plan on which the episodes are arranged to produce a logical and symmetrical dramatic movement. In the novel of character, built on the epic model, these incidents or anecdotes are attached rather to the characters whose traits they illustrate; but in the dramatic novel they are mostly strung on the thread of sequence — of cause and effect — that constitutes the spinal cord of the whole organism. It will help us at this point to take a closer view of dramatic plot-structure.

When a story is built like a drama, it begins with "exposition," in which most of the characters are introduced. The atmosphere of these opening scenes usually is one of peace, intended as a contrast to the clash of wills that is to follow. Strife of some kind there must be, otherwise there can be no action. The collision of interests be-

tween characters, or between Fate and the hero or heroine, forms the medium through which the motive power of the plot operates. It should begin as early as possible with some happening that portends conflict and affects the whole subsequent course of events. This is known technically as the "exciting moment." The event may be a little thing, — the entrance of a new character, a frown, a girl's smile bestowed on the wrong man, — but from that moment there is strife of some kind, and the clashing lines of individual ambition flash upon the reader's comprehension, instantly stirring his curiosity as to which of the opposing forces is going to win. The success of the plot demands that we be kept in doubt to the end. As Wilkie Collins said, "Make 'em laugh, make 'em cry, make 'em wait."

The strain now should keep getting more intense, the threads of the plot becoming ever more desperately tangled. The main theme or backbone of the plot is being developed. This phase is called "heightening," or "tying the knot." Somewhere beyond the middle of the book, at a point corresponding with the third act of a classical drama, we reach the "climax," where the

contending forces are most evenly and fiercely balanced. It is often marked by a highly dramatic scene, as where Rawdon Crawley knocks down Lord Steyne in "Vanity Fair." From that moment Becky Sharp's fortunes begin to wane. Her struggle to outwit society, in which she has been a winner up to this point, becomes henceforth a losing fight. The story has entered the "falling" phase, the untying of the knot. Instead of trying to get things "all wound up," as before, the author now must attend to the unwinding or "dénouement" (simply French for "unknotting"), and the rest of the action should move rapidly. If the story drags on too long now, the result will be an "anticlimax."

It is not always easy to recognize the climax, especially in a psychological novel, where the fateful turn of fortune may occur at some moment of no perceptible dramatic value. In such cases it is easy to mistake the "catastrophe" for the climax, because it is more spectacular. The catastrophe, however, is merely the clearing-up episode, in which the villain gets his deserts, the hero his reward; it is the end and vital part of the dénouement. Bliss Perry, in his "Study of Prose

Fiction," likens the climax to the point where a sky-rocket turns and begins to fall, while the catastrophe corresponds to the bursting of the rocket as it nears the ground in its descent.

If the varying intensity of action in the plot may thus be likened to the parabola described by a rocket, the structural form of the plot may be compared rather to a large set-piece of fireworks, ignited at one end, and revealing the shape and details of the design, progressively, the action being represented by the sparkling forefront of the flame as it burns across, until at last the whole piece stands out before the eye, glowing and complete.

The foregoing analysis can be applied only to novels built on dramatic lines, such as Bulwer-Lytton's "The Last Days of Pompeii" or Hardy's "Tess of the D'Urbervilles." Many excellent novels of character have scarcely any plot, the action being devoted chiefly to revealing the people. Again, in romances of adventure, such as "The Three Guardsmen," there is little plot and almost no perceptible dénouement. Dumas has simply given us a fine example of the "romance of incident," in which exciting episodes

are strung together for their own sake, with only moderate attention to character and still less to plot. In the hands of less brilliant masters of narrative this method produces the vaudeville class of fiction, frothy stuff, without form and void, though it may serve certain purposes of entertainment.

You will find that in every novel of the first rank the author has used the incidents not solely for their own interest, but chiefly to reveal some trait of the actors, just as Lincoln used to tell a humorous anecdote to clinch an argument. It is said that Turgenev made a practice of constructing a complete biography of each of his characters before he began to invent the plot, so that he could choose exactly the right kind of incidents through which to show their natures and work out their destinies. The highest ideal of technique, in fact, is that which shapes the incidents so that they both reveal character and advance the plot at the same time. In structural skill of this kind some of the novelists of the present day are unequaled even by the great masters of the nineteenth century.

An interesting example of what I mean will

be found in Mrs. Humphry Ward's novel, "Lady Rose's Daughter." If you have read the book you will remember that Julie Le Breton, the central figure, is portrayed in her relations to the irascible Lady Henry and to two lovers, Delafield and Warkworth. Her daring methods of absorbing the glory of Lady Henry's London salon are so cleverly brought out in various incidents that the elder woman's fierce jealousy seems perfectly natural. Then comes the evening when Julie holds a clandestine reception of her own in Lady Henry's parlors, and the fiery old lady bursts in and scatters the guests like chaff in the storm of her just wrath.

Now, that episode is very interesting in itself, but note the skill with which Mrs. Ward makes it serve a double use in the structure of the novel. The scene results in Julie's instant dismissal. There you have the bearing on the plot, for it throws the girl into new surroundings, where events develop swiftly toward a dramatic climax. But still more important is its bearing on character. In the first place, it shows a shady spot, not to say a yellow streak, in Julie's moral nature, which is a vital part of the main theme of the

story. But it also throws a searchlight upon every character in the little group that comes within range of Lady Henry's white-hot wrath. Each man acts according to the honor or cowardice in his nature, and Major Warkworth, especially, shrivels under the test. Thus do we get a significant light upon this selfish cad, who is later to abuse Julie's love by enticing her to spend two days with him secretly in a villa near Paris — at a time when both he and she are aware that he is about to marry another girl for her wealth. Thus an incident, in itself merely entertaining, becomes in the author's skillful hand both a flashlight for the illumination of character and a charge of gunpowder to speed the ball of the plot on its way.

The whole action of the plot in any of Mr. Hardy's or Mrs. Ward's or Mrs. Wharton's novels will be found to consist of an unbroken chain of such incidents and situations. Reverting to the figure of the sky-rocket, let us imagine that the rocket moves by jerks, caused by small but separate pockets of powder, each of which drives it a little higher, at the same time passing on the spark that ignites the next. Here you have a fair

illustration of how consecutive incidents go to create a dramatic plot. One leads on to the next, logically, inevitably, while all are driven by the primal force of the story's theme, making an unbroken sequence of events leading on to the dénouement. Sometimes there are several such lines of action going on at once, all driving toward the same point, in which case we have a complex plot.

A novel built strictly on the dramatic model must conform, as Ibsen's plays do, to Edgar Allan Poe's definition of plot: "That in which no part can be displaced without ruin to the whole." Our novelists, however, usually are content with an architectural scheme less severe and more amenable to the minor graces of human interest. "Pilgrim's Progress" and "Robinson Crusoe" have no plots at all. Much more highly developed novels, such as "Tom Jones" and "The Newcomes," have little more, being held together largely by the bearing of the incidents upon the fate of the hero. In our day Thomas Hardy is the greatest master of the accurately constructed plot. Examine "Far From the Madding Crowd" or "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," and you will find its

plot to be built with the symmetry of a cathedral and to work with the accuracy of a watch. And this brings us to the subject of the mainspring.

Behind all the consecutive episodes in a story, with their immediate motives, there is a larger compelling force that keeps the whole thing moving toward a predestined end. This is the main motive or theme. It may be some trait of human nature, some peculiar situation, some moral law, or any other primal source of a stream of cause and effect, driving the action steadily on to an inevitable climax and dénouement.

Thus the theme of "The Scarlet Letter" is the expiation of sin. That of "Dombey and Son" is the selfish pride of Mr. Dombey; it is this pride that runs all the machinery of the plot and affects the lives of all the characters. The mainspring of "Martin Chuzzlewit" is old Martin's fierce distrust of his greedy relatives. In "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel" it is the father's false scheme of education, his odious System, that ruins Richard's happiness and does poor Lucy to death. In "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" the seeming malignity of Fate acts as the motive power, pursuing Tess through all her life and crushing her at last

without justice or mercy. In the majority of light novels, meant merely to entertain, the compelling force behind the action is the love of the hero and heroine, or some variation of that perennial theme.

This main motive, or "motif," or theme, as I prefer to call it, running through a story from introduction to conclusion, is what gives it organic unity, the supreme quality of artistic structure. No story is properly constructed unless it can stand the test of this question: Does it set out toward a definite end and move steadily toward that end until it is attained? Theoretically, every episode and character, every turn of thought, every bit of scenery and background, should be related with this theme in some such vital way as every bone and muscle, every finger and toe, is in living connection with the brain and spinal cord of the human body. Practically, however, we are very tolerant of digressions such as those in which Thackeray indulges, or those in William De Morgan's "Joseph Vance" and other novels, so long as they are full of a magnetic personality and are not allowed to interfere too much with the action.

We come back, then, to the fact that a novel

is a distinct organism, a little world, separate, self-contained, under a complete system of laws and relations of its own. The novelist's task is to produce, not a raw section of real life, but a living microcosm, bounded by the limits of the theme he has chosen. Or, to change the metaphor, he must take certain threads from the real world and weave them, upon the warp of his plot, into an artistic tapestry that shall produce the *illusion* of life. To achieve this result he must conform constantly to two distinct codes, — that of human nature and that of art. If he neglects the one, we justly charge him with making his characters unnatural and his action melodramatic. If he violates the other, he fails to produce that impression of symmetry and completeness which is the life of art.

When the thrifty settler builds a log cabin, adds later a frame kitchen on the rear, attaches a chicken-coop to that, and at last builds on a cement annex to accommodate his growing family, the difference between his happy home and the Capitol at Washington is not merely one of size and purpose. There is a vital difference of architectural unity. The Capitol is symmetrically formed

of a central dome and two evenly balanced wings, each ending in a pavilion, and all combined so that each part is felt to belong to every other part. The architect has chosen one theme and never swerved from it. The result is harmony, something pleasing to the eye, satisfying to the artistic sense. It possesses the same quality which, when found in literature, makes you glad to read a book over and over again. Indeed, the five component parts of this building may be likened to the five parts of a dramatic plot, — introduction, development, climax, dénouement, conclusion; the dome standing for the climax.

The structural difference between the settler's cabin and the Capitol is no greater than that between the crude thrillers of, say, the late Archibald Clavering Gunter and the best novels of such writers as Mr. Hardy, Mr. Howells, and Mrs. Humphry Ward. Yet many readers prefer "Mr. Barnes of New York" to "David Grieve." They can defend their peculiar artistic tastes, too, by a classical authority, — that of Æsop. "Give me a barleycorn," said the barnyard cock, "before all the jewels in the world."

IV

CHARACTER DRAWING

The characters are the most vital and important part of a novel, and the novelist must be judged primarily by his power of creating story people that seem alive, natural, consistent, memorable. There can be no great fiction without good character drawing. A story of mere incident may entertain us for the moment, but it cannot live. Here, then, is a test of high art in a story: Does any one of the characters abide in your memory as distinctly as a flesh-and-blood acquaintance?

Character can be revealed on the stage in only two legitimate ways, — by action and by dialogue. In fiction these can be supplemented by description. A play must be self-explanatory, but the author of a novel, standing apart from his characters, can tell how they look, can say what they think and feel, can even moralize or joke about their frailties, as Thackeray does. This wider liberty allows him to stamp his work with his own style and personality; but description, if

used too freely, easily lapses into dullness; the mainstay of the novelist, after all, is narrative of things done and said.

One of the first things that we demand of a novel is that the dialogue shall be natural, consistent, and interesting. The characters must talk like real people, yet, unlike real people, must always say something worth reading. The fiction of Anthony Hope abounds in good dialogue. The talk of the characters in James Fenimore Cooper's novels sometimes is stilted and unnatural; that in Augusta Evans's "St. Elmo" is somewhat inflated and sentimentally bombastic. The dialogue, like the action, should reveal the character of the individual at every turn. An untutored Indian should not talk like a college professor. Unless we feel that the conversation is "just like" the various speakers, our interest soon flags. As a rule the talk should contribute to the dramatic movement as well, but this is not so necessary.

Even in the best fiction you will find incidents and bits of dialogue that have no functional connection with the plot — that serve solely to reveal traits of character. These are really bits of

description translated into action or dialogue to make them more interesting and illuminating. Such an episode might be called character-action to distinguish it from plot-action.

When you meet a stranger in real life it is necessary, before you can feel any lively interest in him, that you have something more than a catalogue of his qualities and a formal introduction. If you see him tenderly pick up a lost baby-girl, comfort her, and help her to find her mother on the crowded street, your interest deepens. If you see him snatch a child from beneath a horse's hoofs at imminent peril to himself, your interest grows to admiration. Then if you hear that he is silently suffering because his only son, in a moment of mistaken impulse, has committed a crime, you are ready to feel a genuine sympathy, even to aid him if it is in your power. Your interest is no longer merely intellectual: it has got into your heart.

The first thing that the novelist must do is to create this kind of sympathy for the people he introduces to us. He must arouse in us a strong feeling for or against them, according to their qualities. We are moved by the death of Colonel

Newcome solely because we have known him in his daily life and learned to love him for his noble nature as revealed in his words and deeds. It is only when we see characters do and suffer, or hear them speak out of the impulses of their own hearts, that we really begin to care what becomes of them. Then and then only can they touch our emotions, our humor, sympathy, detestation, or love. Merely to label them with their qualities will not interest us. We must see each one doing and saying things that are "just like him."

Note how William J. Locke, in his light novel, "Septimus," hits off the good-natured, helpless, irresponsible character of his hero at the first meeting with the heroine. Simple Septimus looks with bored apprehension at his winnings — for the scene is at Monte Carlo — and asks the young woman (whom he never has seen before) to keep the gold pieces for him. Then follows this dialogue: —

"Why should you be happier if I took care of your money?" she asked.

"I should n't spend it. I might meet a man who wanted me to buy a gas engine."

"But you need n't buy it."

"These fellows are so persuasive, you see. At Rotterdam last year a man made me buy a second-hand dentist's chair."

"Are you a dentist?" asked Zora.

"Lord, no! If I were I could have used the horrible chair."

"What did you do with it?"

"I had it packed up and dispatched, carriage paid, to an imaginary person at Singapore."

He made this announcement in his tired, gentle manner, without the flicker of a smile. He added, reflectively: —

"That sort of thing becomes expensive. Don't you find it so?"

"I would defy anybody to sell me a thing I did n't want," she replied.

"Ah, that," said he, with a glance of wistful admiration, "that is because you have red hair."

This episode interests and amuses us, piquing our curiosity as to the manner of man described, lending movement, color, vivacity, to what in the form of mere description would have been dull and dead. In this respect it is good art. But does the incident seem entirely probable? Would any man, however erratic, be likely to ask an entire stranger to keep a large pile of gold for him? No; the author is using romantic license, making a sort

of fairy story for adults rather than a novel of real life. So long as he can keep his readers under the romantic spell of what Coleridge calls "the willing suspension of disbelief," he can sustain their interest, and is doing good work of its kind. But the greater the liberties he takes with the probabilities, the shorter the life of his story is likely to be. And this brings us to the subject of motives.

Behind every act of a rational being there is a motive. When people in real life say and do things, their words and acts are the outward expression of inward ideas and impulses. Likewise every act of a character in a novel should be the result of a reasonable motive in conformity with his own nature and with human nature in general. Even the most whimsical tale, whatever its fantastic license, must be based on some human trait. The moment fiction characters cease to act by understandable human motives our interest in them dies, and no amount of jumping-jack action can revive it.

So much for motive in its bearing on character: It must stand the test of *consistency with the individual* and of *probability under the laws of human*

nature. Now for its bearing on plot: *The cause must be sufficient to create the effect ascribed to it.*

The reader of fiction should constantly ask: "Did this man or that woman act naturally or have a sufficient motive for doing this or that deed?" If not, the story is weakened by inadequate motive. Those whose critical taste is undeveloped, however, will not know the difference. This is why so many trashy novels can flourish for a few months and then die so swiftly and utterly. They are full of inconsistent, unnatural, and inadequate motives: but thousands of readers, too young or too unobservant to be jarred by the false notes, get a temporary pleasure out of them. Even they never care to read the same stories again. Why? Because they dimly feel the lack of truth and beauty that makes the more critical reader refuse to waste his time on such books at all.

When Time, the arch-critic, goes forth on slaughter bent, choosing the few elect novels from the thousands that have met popular favor, he strikes down more for the sin of unnatural or insufficient motive than for any other one defect. Ignorance of life and character, and careless composition, are the besetting faults of the prolific

popular author, and the test of motive will reveal his shortcomings in nearly every chapter. Try the romances of George Barr McCutcheon by this test, or those of Thomas Dixon, Jr., or those of Marie Corelli, and you will see what makes the characters so often seem unreal, the dramatic movement so often degenerate into melodrama. Hall Caine's work fails under this test oftener than it should.

The most pious candidates for fame often are the first to fall beneath the test of motive. What is the matter with the average Sunday-school story? Nothing, only the characters are prigs, if they are anything so much alive as that, and are constantly forced to do unnatural things for the sake of the "moral." Why have Miss Alcott's juvenile stories lived for half a century while the innumerable company of more openly instructive stories by other writers have perished? Because, among other things, Miss Alcott did not pose her childish characters as if they were having their pictures taken and knew it, but has let us see them playing and working naturally, not posing for the gallery, not looking at the reader every moment to see what he thinks of them.

If there is a moral in their story, it is a part of life, not a pikestaff on which the characters are skewered.

The "purpose novel" in all its forms, suffers more or less because the motives of its characters are wrenched this way or that by the "purpose." Even "Uncle Tom's Cabin," one of the best of its kind, is marred by exaggerations and improbable acts. In the great majority of novels written with a sermonizing purpose the characters are strangled at birth by having too many strings attached to them. They are not only tied to the law of human nature and to the thread of the plot, but also have the noose of the "problem" or " purpose " about their necks, so that they get no chance to draw a natural breath. The author, happily for his own peace of mind, usually is too much interested in his didactic purpose to notice that his puppets are dead.

Often the dramatic plot itself is sufficient to inflict serious injury on the characters. The poor things are forced to do acts that are not consistent with their natures, simply because the author must get his dramatic climax. Bulwer-Lytton, with all his skill in plot, sometimes sinned in this

respect. Ibsen, master of motive as he is, makes Nora act out of character in "A Doll's House" when he has her suddenly assume the airs of a strong-minded woman and leave her husband. Up to that point he had depicted her as a feather-brained, butterfly sort of woman, whom we were no more inclined to take seriously than the husband was.

Thomas Hardy, like Ibsen, scarcely ever errs by inadequacy of motive, but his equally great contemporary, George Meredith, can be caught napping more frequently. In "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel" he fails to convince us that Richard, fresh from the arms of his beloved bride, could so swiftly fall into the hands of an immoral woman. So violent a lapse seems improbable and inconsistent with what we have known of the young man. In "Diana of the Crossways" there is a similar hitch, where Diana sells to the editor of a London newspaper an important state secret confided to her by her lover. Diana was not the kind of woman that could do such a thing, either deliberately or through ignorance. We refuse to believe it, and remember it as a serious defect in an otherwise brilliant novel. Nor is our opinion

altered by the fact that Meredith here undoubtedly had in mind the historic episode charged (unjustly, as it proved) against Mrs. Norton, who served in part as his model for Diana Warwick. The point is, that the thing does not fit Diana: it makes her act "out of character."

To sum up: Everything that happens in a story should be consistent with the characters themselves, with human nature in general, with the laws of cause and effect, and with those larger moral laws that make for human brotherhood. These four points all are important. In proportion as fiction reveals the hidden springs of human action and conforms to these laws governing motive, it is likely to rank as high art.

Suppose that a novelist were to represent a placid, kindly old man, taunted by an impudent boy with the ancient cry, "Go up, thou bald head!" as turning suddenly and killing the boy; and suppose the author added that the boy deserved what he got. The story would violate three of the four points I have named. The killing would be an act within the possibilities of impulsive human nature, but it would be inconsistent with this particular old man's nature; the cause would be

insufficient to account for the effect, and the author's approval of the murder would be a breach of the moral law that governs good art.

A man does not need to jump through a window, or a woman to go into an emotional fit, in order to produce action or reveal character, either on the stage or in a story. The essential thing is that soul should influence soul, that each should be consistent, and that out of these influences and counter-influences there should be evolved a series of changes of situation such as compose a dramatic plot.

Thus far we have been judging the characters by certain laws drawn from the drama; let us now apply some equally important laws drawn from the painter's art. If you have studied art you know that there is always a centre of high light in good painting, which shades off more or less gradually into deepest shadow. In a figure-painting this burst of light falls upon or near the main figure, illuminating it, revealing its details, fixing your attention upon it. Much the same thing is true of a well-constructed novel. There is always one central figure that dominates the story, that stands in the high light, that monopo-

lizes the reader's interest. Each of the other characters gives up some of his distinctness and individuality for the sake of centring our gaze upon the hero or heroine. Thus, if we regard the action and description in a story as equivalent to the light and color in a painting, we have an effect similar to that produced by the burst of radiance which rests upon the Christ-Child in Correggio's Holy Night.

There is another powerful means which both the painter and the novelist must employ to enhance the importance of the central figure. Examine any well-composed group-painting and you will see that all the minor persons are looking at the one in the high light, or at least are thinking about him, as indicated by their attitudes or gestures. This forces our attention upon the main character and helps to give the effect of unity.

It is by the use of light and shade, technically known as chiaroscuro, that the artist produces the rounded effect of solidity in painting a figure on a flat surface. By a similar mingling of moral and temperamental lights and shadows the novelist has learned to produce a like effect of naturalness and reality in character drawing. When the

Egyptians first began to make pictures, they merely drew outlines and left the inclosed space without shading or color. Their art seems childish to us; yet, when the unpracticed novelist paints his heroine all white and his villain all black, his art is only a degree less rudimentary. His characters are flat and unreal, because he is ignoring the fact that light and shadow, good and ill, are mingled everywhere. You will find this defect both in the goody-goody story, whose hero is too good to be true, and in the blood-and-thunder romance, whose villain is too bad to remain unhanged even until the last chapter.

When Rosa Bonheur painted her famous picture of The Horse Fair she set lights a-playing on the sleek coat of the blackest horse, and shadows on the whitest, even in the high light. Hence that superb illusion of reality, making the animals seem almost ready to prance out of the picture. Good character drawing is achieved by a similar mingling of lights and shadows. No man is wholly good or wholly evil. Even a saint has the defects of his qualities. Human nature is so normally fallible that perfection seems inhuman. We can get up little sympathy for the heroine or

hero who makes never a mistake. It is the occasional faltering note that touches our hearts.

Novelists in our day are improving in this phase of technique. If that were the whole of art, Mrs. Humphry Ward would be greater than Dickens. The general taste of readers, too, is slowly improving in this respect. When you pick up one of the novels that once pleased our mothers or grandmothers, such as Mrs. Stowe's "Agnes of Sorrento," or Augusta Evans's "St. Elmo," or Susan Warner's "The Wide, Wide World," you perceive at once that it is "old-fashioned," though you may not be able to tell what makes it so. In the main it is that the colors are laid on more thickly, that its sentiment is more sentimental, that the good characters are more alarmingly good, the bad ones more desperately wicked, than our present taste approves. Such characters seem less genuine, less able to step out of the pages and sit on the sofa in your back parlor, than, say, almost any of Mr. Hardy's characters, or than Tito Melema, from the pages of "Romola." Tito was a mixture of good and evil, and Romola herself had the hard qualities of her noble virtues. George Eliot gave us the light and shadow in

both, and so they still seem natural and real to us. This is one reason why her novels live while so many others of the same epoch are forgotten.

Novelists in the last half-century have shown an ever-deepening tendency to look into the psychological processes of the characters they create. They are no longer content to show us the story people in action; they must delve into their inner natures and tell us what each person thought, how many different kinds of emotion the heroine felt when the villain deserted her, how the hero's mind worked while he was killing the wretch, and just how many thrills the sweet girl felt when at last she was folded to his manly bosom.

In the main this movement has improved the quality of our fiction, making its human nature more true and genuine, and adding the new kingdom of psychological study to the empire of the novel. As Henry M. Alden has said, the concern of genius is with the life of the spirit in its reaction on the world, and the supreme interest of the greatest fiction of our time is in its psychical interpretations and disclosures. At the same time this sort of fiction very easily degenerates into mere scientific analysis or niggling dilet-

tantism. In proportion as the author dissects his characters before our eyes he destroys their emotional interest, however much he may contribute to the intellectual interest. They are no longer people, but bundles of nerves under dissection. Mr. Howells and Mrs. Ward, in my opinion, have made as large a use of psychological analysis as is compatible with human interest. Mr. James has gone to an extreme that injures his art. He takes all the motives and reactions of his characters into such minute pieces that we feel nothing but cold intellectual curiosity toward them.

Besides being clearly limned, consistent, natural in motive, true in coloring, and reasonably exempt from vivisection, the characters of a novel should also be differentiated in manner. If they all talk alike, the effect is monotonous, unreal. This is one of the defects of George Meredith's novels, though we almost overlook it, as we do his excessive philosophizing, because the monotony is a monotony of brilliance. His ignorant characters are almost as wise as his most learned ones — that is to say, as the brainy Mr. Meredith himself. No such young buck as Edward, in

"Rhoda Fleming," would know enough to pour out such analytical philosophy as he writes off-hand to his chum. The illiterate Mrs. Chump, in "Sandra Belloni," is indeed differentiated by a brogue, but she, too, is philosophical like all the rest. One feels that it is the author who has put her up to remarking, "The quiet lovers, they cry, they do, bucketsful." But one might well forgive worse defects than this for the sake of the pure charm of concept in such phrases as those describing Emilia: "She had made earth lovely to him, and heaven human. . . . A face to find a home in!"

Finally, the characters should not only be differentiated, but should also furnish contrasts. As the villain is needed for a foil to the hero, so the contrasting qualities of the minor characters ought to serve to throw each other into relief. Harmony and contrast — in these lies the chief charm of art. A novel in which all the characters are angelic is like tepid water in the mouth, while one in which all are despicable is like a nauseous medicine. Both are poor art, because they lack the charm of artistic contrast as well as of truth to life.

V

THOUGHT AND IMAGINATION

To be worth reading at all, a book should do one of three things, — make you think, make you feel, or make you see. The best literature does all three things at once. There is no surer test of a novel than to ask whether or not it stirs your imagination and gives you thoughts and emotions worth entertaining.

Imagination, the power of making us see things, is the most important of all, because, as Keats said, it brings the vision of truth to the heart, investing it with sublime emotion, while logic only brings it to the head, cold and barren. In reading a book, therefore, ask yourself: "Has the author the power of making his words conjure up vivid mental pictures before the eye?" He must have ideas worth picturing, and the more ideas he packs into his pages the richer they will be, but the mere abstract stating of them is not enough for literature. He must clothe them in imagery that makes us see and feel as well as

think. In fiction the greatest achievement of the imagination is the creation of a living and memorable character.

It will simplify matters if we remember that intellect and emotion are distinct faculties — that the appeal to the head is different from the appeal to the heart. The two faculties are, indeed, inextricably blended in the motives of all human acts and utterances, but they seldom are found in equal control, and it is the preponderance of one or the other that largely shapes the personality of an author and the literary quality of his writings. A man or a book may be brilliant but heartless, as Swift is in his "Journal to Stella." Intellect prevails at the expense of sympathy. On the other hand, an author may be tenderhearted but intellectually weak. Almost any mawkishly sentimental novel of the hour will illustrate the point.

These two elements are of equal importance in literature, but some authors and readers esteem the one more highly, some the other. The masses of "general readers," including the uneducated, prefer a sentimental and emotional story, whether it have any brains or not. The overcultured few,

including the scholastic critics, are inclined to regard intellectual force and subtlety as the whole of literary art. Both are partly wrong, because both ignore the fact that thought and feeling in art are Siamese twins.

The trouble with the uncultivated taste is that it does not distinguish between the false and the true emotional appeal. While reading emotional novels, then, it will be well to pause occasionally, become critical, and see whether we are laughing and weeping over characters and events true to life or merely over wooden puppets dangled on a string. This does not mean that we need to become hypercritical, picking to pieces every flower of sentiment or applying a tape-measure to every humorous conceit. But it is certain that some books are destined to go swiftly into the dust-heap, while others are destined to go on winning friends through the years because of some element of truth and greatness in them. If we wish to select these greater books and get the greater enjoyment that they offer, we must use our brains as well as our emotions.

Intellect proves its presence in a book by logical and coherent construction, by the author's

grasp and marshaling of facts or events toward a definite end, by the truth of his thought, the keenness of his insight, or the vigor with which he compels us to think. True emotion shows itself by stirring us to tears, laughter, indignation, or pity so genuine that we can feel the same emotions after repeated readings and even at different periods of life. When a book leaves you cold and indifferent it is a sign of emotional poverty — probably in the author or in his art, perhaps in yourself. The great writers are those who make us both feel and think — by first making us see. No book is worth while unless it can enlarge either our thought or our sympathies; none is great unless it can do both.

In the novels of George Meredith intellect is strongly predominant, as seen in the wealth and brilliancy of the philosophical epigrams with which he brocades such stories as "Diana of the Crossways" and "Evan Harrington," or in the searching psychological analysis of "The Egoist." In most of his novels the solid intellectualism is softened somewhat by poetic feeling, but in "The Egoist" he has given us brains with little heart, making a brilliant, merciless,

critical study of egoism, a scientific dissection of traits and motives, rather than a well-rounded novel.

The later novels of Henry James furnish an extreme example of intellectual subtlety gone to seed for lack of emotional irrigation at the roots. "The Golden Bowl," "The Ambassadors," and "The Wings of the Dove" are wonderfully discerning and minute studies; an alert and insatiable curiosity on the author's part caters to a similar trait in the reader, but the emotional appeal is scarcely greater than that of a museum catalogue. One cannot imagine Mr. James coming out of his study with tears in his eyes after the death of one of his characters, as Thackeray did after he had killed Colonel Newcome. Neither can one imagine any of his readers making a midnight journey of several miles to wake a friend with the joyful news that one of Mr. James's villains is dead, as an enthusiastic reader of Dickens did when Mr. Carker came to a well-deserved end.

Mrs. Humphry Ward, though also an "intellectualist," has more warmth, makes more use of dramatic if not emotional situations, more often

impresses her characters upon the memory by making us feel pity or resentment or love for them. Edith Wharton probably belongs somewhere between Mr. James and Mrs. Ward in the scale of emotional values. Both women might be called literary descendants of George Eliot, but both lack something of George Eliot's depth of feeling and force of imagination.

Thomas Hardy uses his brains, not to analyze his characters, not to make epigrams, but to construct plots as perfect as a watch, and to create characters that seem alive. There is intellect here, but it is not of the analytical kind, and there is also sympathy of an austere sort. Poor Tess, in the grip of circumstance, affects us painfully, like the vivid vision of a drowning girl who stretches up her arms in wild appeal to a pitiless heaven and then sinks from sight before our eyes. It is not pathos; it is tragedy — Greek tragedy. The pity of it is deeper than tears, stirring intellect and emotion together. The effect is depressing, but that is a matter we shall discuss when we come to examine the author's philosophy. The point to note here is that Mr. Hardy feels deeply and conveys his feeling through imagination and a

clean intellectual mastery of the dramatic method. Incidentally, he also touches our sensibilities on the funny-bone in the humorous dialogues of some of his peasants. The same methods, with less fatalistic gloom, prevail in the novels of Eden Phillpotts, of which two of the best are "The Secret Woman" and "The Three Brothers." Mr. Kipling, a master of bold imagination, also can make us both think and feel, but the thinking usually is paramount.

When we come to a writer such as Robert Louis Stevenson, we find the intellectual content of his work bathed in an iridescent shimmer of fancy, which colors and lends beauty to all his thoughts. We read "David Balfour," and still more Stevenson's essays, for their manner as well as their substance. Yet he is no sentimentalist. His feeling, so to speak, is on the outside of his writings. The main appeal of his imaginative pictures is still to the intellect. But when we turn to Mr. Barrie or Ian Maclaren we find their stories touching us to spontaneous tears and laughter. The appeal of "Sentimental Tommy" and "Beside the Bonnie Brier-Bush" is chiefly to the emotions, and for that reason they are popular. Both are good ex-

amples of the close connection between humor and pathos.

Neither the emotionalism nor the popularity of these stories is any proof of their inferiority. The writer who touches the springs of tears by some simple tale of gratitude, of kindness, of heroic self-sacrifice, may be as true an artist as he who dissects a human heart before our eyes. The merit of the work depends upon whether the humor or sentiment is forced, the emotion inflated, or whether the characters and situations seem natural and true. Our standards of art need not be so austere as those of the Greek judges who drove a dramatist out of the country for moving them to tears.

The value of sentiment, as of every other pigment in the artist's color-box, depends upon its genuineness and the skill with which it is used to create the illusion of the real. Dickens, the greatest of all sentimentalists, sometimes lets the pumps be heard behind his death-scenes, but he never errs in sympathy. He makes us see something to be loved or pitied in almost every character. "He depicts even his Nancy, vulgar drab that she is, in such a way that our hearts ache

for her." The genuineness of his sentiment is proved by the fact that any one who likes his novels at all can read them over and over again with pleasure.

What has made "David Harum" live and threaten to pass into a proverb? Humor and sentiment, of course. In so far as these have been used to round out and impart life to the shrewd and soft-hearted Yankee hero of that story, they are as legitimate as the most elusive and wearisome analysis that Mr. James could have made. The plot, indeed, is feeble, the other characters are indistinct, but David himself is alive enough to account for his enormous popularity.

Wit is of the head, humor of the heart. Reflective writers, such as George Eliot and Mr. Meredith, are more often witty than humorous. Analytical minds turn naturally to wit, impressionistic minds to humor. Dickens, who had no gift for analysis, is always humorous, never witty. On the other hand, the peppery speeches of Mrs. Poyser in "Adam Bede" are pure wit — fun born of incisive thought. Mr. Meredith, who is still more philosophical, gives us what he calls comedy, meaning a kind of intellectual humor

that would make you laugh if it did not keep you too busy thinking to waste time on such frivolity.

The forms and uses of emotion in fiction are as varied as the phases of human nature itself. Guy de Maupassant indicated this diversity when he said: "The public is composed of numerous groups who say to us: 'Console me — amuse me — make me sad — make me sentimental — make me dream — make me laugh — make me tremble — make me weep — make me think.'" Notice that the "make-me-think" group is only one of the nine, and no doubt the smallest at that, though its books in the main will last the longest. Each of the artistic aims just indicated is legitimate. The value of the product in each case depends upon the perfection of the art and the depth and beauty of the impression it produces. The test of the emotional element in a book is found in the nature of its effect on the reader. "Does it leave any kind of wholesome or fine feeling?"

The most ordinary and superficial kind of story-interest is that of curiosity. Even the feat of keeping idle curiosity craning its neck to the end — to see which of the suspects committed

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the murder, or to see whether Angelina marries Edwin or Algernon — requires something more than a thimbleful of brains on the author's part, though not on the reader's. Perhaps the next higher is mere sentiment, which at least adds feeling to curiosity. From these the values range upward through all the degrees of emotion that constitute human interest, and human interest itself is deepened and enriched by thought, until we reach the heights where dwell the masterpieces — "Hamlet," "Don Quixote," "Vanity Fair," "David Copperfield," "The Heart of Midlothian," "Adam Bede," "Les Misérables," "Père Goriot," "Anna Karénina," and the rest. All the great books not only stir deep emotions, but carry our thoughts out from the individual case to the great issues of human welfare.

Another thing the greatest novels and dramas do: they make you feel that you are looking upon part of a vast and complex life. A novel is a record of a man's or woman's relations with society, and the master-workers, using their powerful imaginations, bring a whole section of this society before our eyes, or at least make us feel that the little drama in the high light before us is but a part

of tangled and manifold human activities that stretch far away into the shadows, even beyond the frame of the picture. Dickens and Balzac produce this effect by constantly giving us vivid glimpses of minor characters that move across the scene and then disappear to give place to others.

One thing that makes "Vanity Fair" or "Anna Karénina" greater than, say, "The Scarlet Letter," is the vastness of its canvas. It requires a larger force of genius to breathe life and interest into a picture of an army than into one or two figures. Description on a large scale, such as Sienkiewicz compasses in "Pan Michael" or "Quo Vadis," is one phase of this rare power. His pictures of the boundless steppes, his huge battle-scenes, are tremendous, unforgettable. As Professor Phelps has said, it is as if we viewed the whole drama of blood from a convenient mountain-peak. Probably no writer except Tolstoy ever excelled this Verestchagin of the pen in this sort of word-painting.

How about a story with a sad ending? Is it better or worse for not ending happily? The answer depends upon the nature and significance of the tragedy. Charles Dudley Warner put the

whole thing in a nutshell when he said: "The indispensable condition of the novel is that it shall entertain. And for this purpose the world is not ashamed to own that it wants, and always will want, a story that has an ending, and if not a good ending, then one that in noble tragedy lifts up our nature into a high plane of sacrifice and pathos." A book that ends in sorrow merely to harrow one's feelings — that does not illumine its pain with any larger meaning, any lesson of renunciation, any new light on the laws of life and death — is only so much morbid sensationalism. It is as empty as it is depressing.

But it is different with suffering that exalts the spirit, as does the death of Sydney Carton for his friend in "A Tale of Two Cities," or that deepens our knowledge of human nature in a way that makes us love the good and hate the evil, as does the tragic series of events in "King Lear." In the hands of a sincere and high-minded writer sorrow is one of the most precious materials of art. To resolve arbitrarily never to read a story unless it ends with wedding-bells is to refuse to look upon most of the deeper and finer aspects of life.

To enjoy imaginative literature one must have an imagination akin to that of the author himself, at least to the extent of being able to see the imagery that he conjures up before the mind's eye. Without this you are in the unfortunate state of the puffy little man who stood before one of Turner's pictures and exclaimed, "We never see clouds like those!" and was answered by Ruskin: "Ah, but would n't you like to be able to see clouds like those?"

This power of creating vivid and beautiful scenes, characters, and imagery by means of words is the supreme test of the poet and fiction-writer. Without it, no depth of feeling can be put into lasting verbal form. The Bible, in its simplest as in its grandest passages, glows with imagination. Shakespeare's dramas are "of imagination all compact." The inexhaustible power of Dickens to conjure up in our minds a wealth of imagery, minute, grandiose, grotesque, humorous, inspiring, eternally human, is the chief measure of his greatness. He makes us see more things in a single page than any other novelist, and in all his forty works there is not an impure image.

Even when a great imagination wastes itself on the ugly things of life, as Balzac's so largely does, its greatness is still impressive. Balzac lives by preference in an atmosphere of the ignoble. As Taine has said, he has "gone searching in every secret cesspool for strange and unhealthy creatures who live outside the pale of law and nature," and when he comes forth he often exhales the odor of the sewer. But always and everywhere he reveals the inexhaustible fecundity of imagination that has made the Comédie Humaine a monstrous Babel, with its forty volumes and its two thousand characters "appearing and disappearing and reappearing like the faces on the street," so that the structure of his product looms upon the sight like some vast monument of a vanished civilization, testifying to the gigantic powers of the architect. The imagination is that of a Titan, though it too often takes you into an inferno whither you may decline to follow.

This creative power — this faculty of making us see — which we call imagination when it conjures large conceptions into reality before the inward eye, is usually called fancy when we find it producing the little decorative flowers of style

and illustration. Fancy is less bound by reality; it runs easily into the bizarre, the unreal, becoming fantasy. Milton had a splendid imagination, Poe a rich but morbid fancy. Hawthorne was dominated by a fancy that rendered many of his creations fantastic, while Kipling has an imagination that can make a primeval monster, conjured from the depths of the sea, more real and unforgettable than the horses on your own city streets.

Metaphor is the favorite fairy-chariot of pretty fancies. Wealth and felicity of metaphor, indeed, are among the first signs by which you may know the literary artist. The surface of Mr. Howells's narrative usually is a shimmering web of fanciful — though never fantastic — metaphors and similes. Mr. James is especially apt in this use of metaphor, often for the conveying of whimsical conceits. With him, as one of his admirers has said, fancy follows imagination, darting all around it, as some small bird follows, sometimes impeding, the flight of a larger one, but holding the spectator fascinated by its unexpected flashings and flexions. It is this fanciful brightness of style that constitutes much of the charm of Mr. James for those who like his fiction.

Intellect can shape the lines of a plot, but it cannot create a living character. Only imagination, daughter of the comprehending heart and the feeling mind, can do that, or shape the dialogues and episodes that show us a character in living action. Imagination without feeling is cold, but intellect without imagination is dead; it is mere invention, the putting of puppets into action without breathing life into them or even making us see them. Poe could invent better than he could create. "The Murders of the Rue Morgue" and "The Gold Bug," for instance, are noteworthy merely for their intellectual ingenuity; while in "The Fall of the House of Usher," and other stories of the kind, where his fancy has full play, the imagery often is so horrible as to be a sort of offense to one's own soul. Poe is an artist in his method, but his art is mostly that of gargoyles. He makes you see and feel, — in a certain morbid way, — but he seldom makes you think; his tales are meagre of substance, almost devoid of human interest.

Imagination at its best must have the glow, the fire, the spontaneity that comes only through the fusing of the materials of life in the furnace of the

author's own earnest and sympathetic emotions. Only by first feeling the truth in his own heart can he conceive the beautiful imaginative forms that will convey the truth to our hearts. When this truth and these forms take on the semblance of memorable human characters, the product is one of the highest forms of literature.

VI

SETTING AND ATMOSPHERE

Background and atmosphere are comparatively new elements in fiction. The early storytellers troubled themselves little about the environment of the events they narrated. You find in the Bible no descriptions of scenery in this sense. You never find the author of the "Arabian Nights" pausing to paint the scenic background of the adventures of Aladdin, Ali Baba, or Sindbad. "Robinson Crusoe" gives us no glowing pictures of tropical scenery or crimson sunsets.

Just as the early artists of the Renaissance painted their angels and saints without any perspective background whatever, so the early storytellers let the events of their narratives stand bare and unrelated to the hills, skies, people, and customs amid which they took place. Yet this scenic element has become an indispensable feature of modern art, especially of literary art, enriching and deepening it, and lending new significance to the human figures portrayed in such setting.

Not until the coming of Scott did novelists learn to make a definite artistic use of natural scenery as a sort of frame for the human picture; and since the appearance of "Waverley" this feature has slowly been elaborated until it has become a valued part of the beauty of the picture itself. The finest descriptive touches ever put into fiction are coming from the novelists of our own day. Thomas Hardy is a master of nature-painting; so is George Meredith; so is Eden Phillpotts; so is James Lane Allen. Much of the poetic spirit that used to go into poems now goes into these descriptive passages of prose fiction. Again and again Meredith pauses, with the zest of a nature-lover, to give us glimpses of the scenes in which his characters move — as, for instance, in "Diana of the Crossways": —

> February blew southwest for the pairing of the birds. A broad warm wind rolled clouds of every ambiguity of form in magnitude over peeping azure, or skimming upon lakes of blue and lightest green, or piling the amphitheater for majestic sunset.

Mr. Phillpotts uses lower color-tones, but, like Mr. Hardy, he makes his nature-pictures vital parts of his fiction. Stevenson is a master of this

art. Note the verbal music and the color harmonies of the following picture of daybreak on a tropic sea, with the Turneresque touch by which we are made to glimpse the dim isle through the dawn. It is from "Ebb-Tide."

There was little or no morning bank. A brightening came in the east; then a wash of some ineffable, faint, nameless hue between crimson and silver; and then coals of fire. These glimmered awhile on the sea-line, and seemed to brighten and darken and spread out; and still the night and the stars reigned undisturbed. It was as though a spark should catch and glow and creep along the foot of some heavy and almost incombustible wall-hanging, and the room itself be scarce menaced. Yet a little after, and the whole east glowed with gold and scarlet, and the hollow of heaven was filled with the daylight. The isle — the undiscovered, the scarce believed in — now lay before them and close aboard; and Herrick thought that never in his dreams had he beheld anything more strange and delicate.

This art of creating at once a frame and a background for the human drama adds much to the lasting qualities of fiction if handled with restraint, but if overdone it soon becomes wearisome. When you find a novel dull it is often because of

too much description of one kind or another. The action is clogged by it; but there is a still deeper reason why we so often (let us confess it) secretly "skip" long descriptions. The fact is that words are not the best medium for painting big pictures. As Mr. Meredith says, "The art of the pen (we write on darkness) is to rouse the inward vision, instead of laboring with a drop-scene brush, as if it were to the eye; because our flying minds cannot contain a protracted description." This is why the poets, who flash their pictures into our imagination with a word or a phrase, make us see things most vividly. Description is an element of strength in a novel only so long as it is kept subordinate to the human and dramatic values.

The most skillful use of natural scenery will be found in the novels of Thomas Hardy, notably in "The Return of the Native," where the sombre atmosphere of Egdon Heath envelops and covers the whole story and its characters. Stevenson once said that there are only three ways of writing a story. You may make a plot and fit characters to it, you may take a character and choose incidents and situations to develop it, or you may

take a certain atmosphere and get action and persons to express it. This last is what Mr. Hardy has done in "The Return of the Native." Egdon Heath, ancient, wild, sombre, beautiful, awe-inspiring, broods over every scene and figure. By his art the author subtly conveys the impression that the drama of the Yeobrights and Eustacia Vye partakes of the same antiquity and grandeur as "haggard Egdon." As Mr. Dawson has said, the effect upon the characters and upon the reader is one of the most extraordinary miracles of art. In like manner Giles Winterbourne and Marty South in "The Woodlanders" are part of the woodland scenery, fitting into it and interpreting it, much as the bowed figures in Millet's The Angelus interpret the brooding tenderness that pervades the whole picture. In this intimate rendering of the spirit of scenery Mr. Hardy is supreme among novelists.

The modern novelist often makes a similar use of storms, sunshine, clouds, and other manifestations of the elements to symbolize and heighten the effect of dramatic episodes. Note, for instance, in "The Three Brothers," how the wild easterly gale and the ravens plodding into the

teeth of the wind harmonize with Humphrey Baskerville's wild mood and typify the storm raging in his breast. Or mark how the tempest and the black night heighten the dramatic thrill of the escape of the prisoners in the early chapters of Stevenson's "St. Ives." In like manner the calm, sweet, glowing beauties of the forest environment in James Lane Allen's Kentucky romance, "The Choir Invisible," are in exquisite harmony with the calm nobility of spirit with which John Gray and Jessica Falconer renounce their love. Both "The Choir Invisible" and "A Kentucky Cardinal" are choice examples of the poetical and suggestive use of landscape to heighten the beauty of the human sentiment of the story.

In descriptive passages of this kind the priceless gift of imagination has one of its finest opportunities to make its presence or absence felt. The splendid imagination of Dumas is seen at its best in the memorable scene in "The Count of Monte Cristo" where Edmond Dantès, having crept into the shroud of a dead fellow-prisoner, allows himself to be hurled at night from the cliffs of the Château d'If into the dark and stormy Mediter-

ranean. In a single brief paragraph we are made to see what Dantès saw from the water; and, by a daring imaginative turn, we are made not only to see the looming bulk of the dark island but also to feel its sinister threat as Dantès must have felt it: —

He saw above his head a sky black and tempestuous, over the surface of which the wind swept a few swift clouds, revealing at times a little corner of blue heightened by a star; before him stretched a plain, sombre and bellowing, whose waves were beginning to boil as at the approach of a tempest, while, behind him, blacker than the sea, blacker than the sky, rose, like a menacing phantom the granite giant whose sombre point seemed an arm stretched out to snatch back its prey; on the highest rock was a torch lighting two shadows.

Natural scenery is only one of many kinds of background and "local color" at the novelist's disposal. The social setting is still more important. In a historical romance, the author must recreate the life, costumes, weapons, manners, thoughts of the epoch and country in which his scenes are laid, and all the words and acts of his characters must be in harmony with the stage-setting thus produced.

Here, again, Sir Walter Scott was the first to show the right way. He was the creator of the historical romance as we know it to-day, because he was the first to show us living people against a historical background whose very spirit they embodied. He makes the feudal age live again in his scenes. The tournament in "Ivanhoe" and the encounter of the hero with Brian de Bois Guilbert seem real because the men act in harmony, not only with their own natures, but with the mediæval setting. The lifelike portrait of Mary Queen of Scots in "The Abbot" is the more vivid because it stands out against a wonderful background of the life of those turbulent times.

The same use of social setting applies to novels of contemporary manners. The merits of an author often may be gauged by the skill with which he suggests a rich or picturesque social background by means of dialogue, incidents, and minor characters. Dickens is a master in depicting London chimney-pot scenery, but it is with the human element that he is most deeply concerned. His descriptions are lighted at every turn by humor and feeling. He makes us see and feel

the humble or squalid life in every nook and corner of London's teeming East End. Thackeray does much the same for the wealthier quarter. Though "Vanity Fair" was not intended as a historical novel, its picture of smart English society in the second decade of the nineteenth century is probably the largest and truest to be found either in fiction or in history.

In her own way Mrs. Humphry Ward is giving us in her novels the best existing picture of the social life of the provincial English gentry in our own day, while in a different way Mr. Phillpotts is chronicling the peasant life of the Devon moors. In the books of these writers, and, indeed, of all novelists with artistic ideals above the shilling shocker, you will find the dramatic threads of the plot woven in and out through a carefully prepared background, upon which the characters move in harmonious colors.

So highly does the modern novelist prize this artistic use of "local color" that almost every distinctive locality now has its own fiction specialist. James Lane Allen lays the scenes of all his stories in Kentucky, Mary Wilkins Freeman devotes herself to New England, Thomas Nelson

Page gives us Virginia life, George W. Cable Creole life in the neighborhood of New Orleans. In so far as each makes us feel that his story could not have been enacted equally well in any other place, he is making the proper use of his chosen background.

The omission of all description of environment makes the narrative thin, bare, more prone to wither and perish. Too much of it, on the other hand, clogs the action and weighs down the story. "Romola" would have been a better novel if the author had condensed her vast fund of archæology into fewer pages. "Les Misérables" would be seriously injured by those interpolated chapters of history if one had to read them all. Balzac overdoes his interior descriptions of houses, which often become mere catalogues of furniture and upholstery. Zola has weighted his "Rome," "Paris," and "Lourdes" with enough description and history to sink them swiftly into the sea of oblivion.

The test of all descriptions in fiction is simply this: Do they add anything to the beauty of the story or the understanding of the characters? As to the social setting: Is it essentially true to the

life of the period depicted? Does it harmonize with the theme and people of the story? Does it help you to a better understanding of them? Finally, as to all description of environment of any kind: Is it held within bounds and not allowed to retard the movement or become wearisome?

Some of the new psychological novelists are making a peculiar use of background. Robert Hichens, for instance, in "The Garden of Allah," gives a powerful impression of the African desert by revealing its reaction upon the human soul. Instead of describing the tawny wastes, the brown sands throbbing under tropic sun, the ghostly caravans and fronded oases dim under the spell of night, he describes the emotions which these produce in his characters. We see the desert through the feelings of his hero and heroine, and its beauties and terrors take on a human meaning.

Arthur Symons and Edward Hutton use an elementary form of this same psychological method in their descriptions of cities: Instead of describing buildings and people, they are telling us, half the time, what sensations and imagery were roused in themselves when they looked upon

Granada, or Naples, or Assisi. Apparently this subjective mode is destined to be further elaborated and to have a definite place in the technique of fiction. Henry James already has carried it to extremes by showing one character through the temperament of another, and even a third through that. Fine shades of this kind soon become too subtle for general interest.

The emotional reflex of background seen in "The Garden of Allah" is much the same thing as atmosphere. The atmosphere of a novel is something apart from the setting, plot, and characters, though largely emanating from them. It is a diaphanous element, like the intervening air that "bathes the mountain in its azure hue," or like the almost imperceptible veil used by Velasquez to soften and humanize the lines of his realistic portraits. The characters of some stories seem to move in a rosy haze of romance or sentiment, while those of others seem to stand in the hard white light of a winter noonday. The explanation lies in the author's use of his power of indirect suggestion. Maeterlinck deliberately produces an intellectual aura about his plays by means of symbolism. He uses words not only as

current coin but at the same time as symbols of outlying thoughts or truths, thus creating an atmosphere of invisible stimulus to the mind. Ibsen's "Peer Gynt" and "The Master-Builder" are full of a like symbolism. So is Kipling's "They."

The ordinary kind of atmosphere, however, is produced by suggestions that appeal to the emotions or the imagination rather than to the intellect. These suggestions may be an emanation from the setting, as in "The Return of the Native"; or they may lurk in the talk of the characters, as in Kipling's tales of "Soldiers Three"; or they may be direct expressions of the author's own personality, as in the case of Thackeray's little "asides." In any event the result is to envelop the story in an atmosphere of related ideas or emotions quite apart from the plot.

George Meredith puts so many thought-compelling aphorisms into his novels that his characters seem half obscured by a white veil of some kind, at times reminding one of the beautiful but bloodless figures that Puvis de Chavannes used to paint on walls. The atmosphere is one of poetic intellectualism. Dickens, on the other hand,

creates an atmosphere of sentiment. The air about his favorite characters is clear but warm, caressing, fairly vibrating with sympathy. Scott produces an atmosphere of the "brave days of old" by his suggestive use of moated castles, donjon keeps, and all the picturesque upholstery of feudalism. Thus each piece of imaginative writing has its distinctive atmosphere, bright or rosy or gloomy, according to the nature of the indirect suggestions that the author chooses to convey. Atmosphere is closely allied to spirit, — the author's attitude toward life, — but spirit is a larger affair, as we shall see when we come to discuss it later.

The final and highest aspect of environment is found in the bearing of every supremely great novel upon some universal principle. The particular point of the narrative, the individual case, is not enough in itself; it must make us feel that it stands for something universal, reaching out to all humanity and including ourselves. In other words, the story must be shaped with some eternal law of life and conduct always in view, as a ship is steered toward a star; and when we have finished it we should feel, if not distinctly see, this larger conclusion toward which the author

has been leading us. Call it a "moral" or "lesson," if you will, but note that its lines are hidden deep in the heart of the story, unuttered, yet compelling in us a sense that the little drama we have been looking upon is also a part of the great drama that is sweeping ourselves along toward an unknown climax.

"Vanity Fair" leaves this note of universality vibrating in the mind after we have seen the rise and fall of Becky Sharp. "The Heart of Midlothian" does the same through the courage and self-sacrifice of Jeanie Deans. "David Copperfield" strikes the universal note repeatedly in its characters and scenes. Tolstoy's "War and Peace" rests upon the author's profound conviction that war is cruel and hateful, and when we finish the book we feel that its truth applies not only to the characters that have suffered before our eyes, not only to Russia, not only to Europe, but to all lands and all mankind.

A story may be bright and entertaining without any such large idea underlying it and shaping it, but it cannot belong to the select company of the greatest. No cleverness of plot, no vivacity of dialogue, no scintillation of style, can atone for

the absence of this universal note. Yet this element is seldom found in the popular novel of the day. The very entertaining romances of such writers as F. Marion Crawford, Stanley J. Weyman, and Anthony Hope have it not, and their life is brief accordingly. Behind the obvious clash of the conflicting characters one seldom feels the background of a weightier issue, — the conflict of principle. The same is true of Poe. The Anglo-Saxon reader feels less than satisfied if there be not some kind of moral significance back of the stories he reads.

VII

COMPOSITION AND UNITY

Every work of art should be shaped upon a single idea or theme, introduced in the beginning and developed to an appropriate conclusion, making a single, self-contained, self-sufficient whole, a unity built up of harmoniously related parts, much as a ship's ribs, planking, decking, and other parts are shaped and placed always with reference to the keel. As the shipbuilder begins by laying the keel, so the novelist should begin by getting his central idea clearly in mind. He must see the end from the beginning, and should write toward it at every moment.

"From all its chapters, from all its pages, from all its sentences," says Stevenson, "the well-written novel echoes and reëchoes its one creative and controlling thought; to this must every incident and character contribute; the style must have been pitched in unison with this."

We have seen in a previous chapter how the theme, like the mainspring of a watch, drives all

the plot-action. But this is only one phase of literary unity. The same principle extends to the whole structure and most of its ornaments — to the characters, the dialogue, the incidents, the setting, the style, and the treatment. Between the least and the greatest there should be an "interplay of team-work." When we have finished the book, we should be able to see the one controlling artistic purpose running right through it; with this as his keynote the author has made the various parts chime together, as do the notes of a great chord of music or the color-tones in a painter's masterpiece. The harmony should be such as to produce in the reader something of that satisfying sense of unity and completeness which we feel in looking upon a Greek temple.

Unity in a novel may be most easily illustrated, perhaps, in its bearing upon the characters. And here our friends the painters can help us. Take, for instance, the beautiful modern painting by Heinrich Hofmann, The Child Jesus in the Temple; not only does the high light fall upon the face and white-clad form of the young Christ in the centre of the group, but the faces of all the learned doctors are turned toward him; even the one in the

shadows of the background is seen to have his eyes and mind fixed intently upon the wonderful boy whose lips are uttering such strange wisdom. The picture is a fine example of good figure-composition. The attitudes and expressions of the various rabbis all take their meaning from the noble young face in the centre, and to this our attention is always called back. The lights and shadows, the poses, the coloring, the background, all contribute to the same centralizing effect. The result is a satisfying sense of perfect unity.

The ordinary "group-photograph," representing, say, a class of high-school pupils, has no such unity. The lights and shades may be artistically arranged, but each member of the class is looking straight out of the picture, or in any direction that happens to be convenient. The scene lacks composition. It is a section of life, not a work of art. In his invaluable little book, "How to Judge of a Picture," Professor John Van Dyke makes the point clear in these words: —

> The proper composition of a picture requires the superior importance of one person, object, or feature. This feature must be strong enough and prominent enough to rule every other feature in the picture. If,

for instance, an artist would paint the Last Supper, the figure of Christ must be central in position, light, and color. It is no matter what were the positions in the actual scene centuries ago. Historic truth, if it were known, must be sacrificed to art truth.

The same law governs the novel. All the other characters really exist only to heighten the significance of the protagonist. Even in the crudest melodrama the villain's chief function is to give the hero a better chance to show off his courage and shining virtues. All the scenes, plots, and counterplots of a novel should be tributary to a central character. The less must be sacrificed to heighten the brilliancy of the greater. In painting this is accomplished mainly by means of posing (composition), relation of light and shadow (chiaroscuro), and the use of distance and color-tones (perspective and values). In fiction it is done by the kindred methods of cause and effect, the bearing of events upon the central figure, the relationships and contrasts of the minor and major characters, and the skillful use of detail, background, and atmosphere.

Put "The Scarlet Letter," for instance, to the same test as Hofmann's painting and see how

completely Hester Prynne stands in the centre of the picture, and how unanimously all the other characters keep their eyes fixed on the flaming letter she wears on her bosom. Not only does the heartless crowd stare at Hester as she comes from the prison and stands suffering on the platform of ignominy, but through all the rest of the story it is upon her and the badge of her sin that all eyes are fixed. Arthur Dimmesdale, who has betrayed her; old Roger Chillingworth, bitter and revengeful; the governor, the other officials, the other preacher, all act with her always in mind. Even little Pearl symbolizes the situation by her passion for putting her baby fingers upon the scarlet letter and lacerating the mother's heart with questions about it. From first to last Hawthorne never swerves from his one theme, — expiation of sin, — and never lets one of the characters assume an attitude other than that which will carry our gaze back to the central figure. The composition is perfect, the unity complete.

The unpracticed novelist's difficulty in keeping his characters from becoming self-conscious and facing the audience rather than their leader is illustrated by Mr. Phillpotts in an amusing scene

in "The Three Brothers." A wide-awake young rector is trying to get the people of his Dartmoor village interested in the church by having them act an old morality play. Each of the rustic actors wishes to exploit his own ideas and personality on the stage, and the first rehearsal nearly drives the patient rector distracted. Father Christmas insists on bowing to the audience instead of to the king on the stage. The youthful St. George strikes a pose for the benefit of the girls on the back seats instead of attending to his lines and killing the Giant. The Giant himself, who happens to be St. George's father in private life, is more inclined to spank his offspring than to let himself be killed. The Russian Bear thinks his whole mission is to make the audience laugh by cutting funny capers; and even after he has been slain, he continues to attract attention to himself by nipping the heels of the other actors. It all results in a "terrible tarrara," for the unity of the play is ruined.

When the novelist lets his characters soliloquize or make speeches that are meant only to convey information to the reader, he is guilty of the same artistic error. He is destroying the illusion of

their intentness on their own affairs. We are no longer looking through a proscenium arch at a mimic world, complete in itself, but are listening to an isolated lecturer who is addressing us directly. Another way to spoil the unity of the picture is to allow one of the minor figures to force himself into the high light. Note how Mrs. Poyser, in spite of all our interest in her pungent wit, is always kept in the background. George Eliot is strong in group-composition. Even when certain of her secondary characters become engrossingly important, as in the case of Hetty Sorrel's murder of her child, they never cease to face in the direction of the hero or heroine.

When the academic critics charged Delacroix, the Barbizon painter, with having "combined all the parts of his work in view of one emotion," they were paying him an unintended compliment. The phrase might well serve as an ideal recipe for attaining artistic unity. I recently read a story that had unity so far as the posing of characters was concerned, but that failed in unity of tone; the author had not worked with one emotion in view. The first half of the book was written in the manner of a farce-comedy, with preposterous

incidents calculated to produce careless laughter, while the latter half took on a serious, religious, pathetic, almost tragic tone. The result was a bad mixture, that left the reader with a feeling that he had been deceived and defrauded.

We have a right to expect that the promise of the opening chapters of a novel will be fulfilled by the closing chapters in some consistent way, though it is equally important that we shall not be allowed to know beforehand what the way will be. We must always feel that something is going to happen, yet must always be kept in suspense until the final thing happens, and then we should be made to feel that it is the inevitable thing toward which we have been traveling all the while. Even the dialogue, like the plot, should advance step by step, in order to focus our attention on the end to which everything is leading up.

The old dramatic unities of time and place have been largely discarded in fiction, but unity of action still imposes its law more or less inexorably. Centring upon it are many minor phases of the same law. Unity of characterization demands that each character shall act consistently with

his own nature and with his past acts. Barkis, however "willin'," must not talk like a college professor; neither must he use an Irish brogue in one chapter and a cockney accent in the next. Unity of ensemble requires that the setting shall be representative of the epoch portrayed. It is not seemly that a six-cylinder automobile should collide with Ben-Hur's chariot, or that his winning of the race should be celebrated by the blowing of steam-whistles. Vice versa, the people and events must be suited to the surroundings. A negro dialect story will not fit well in the scenery of Killarney.

Unity of style calls for harmony between matter and manner. Mark how Stevenson's language in "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" is modulated to the awe-inspiring situation, taking on an entirely different tone from that of the light-hearted Alan Breck in "David Balfour." The very sound of the words used by an author should blend, like harmonious colors, with the spirit of the scene portrayed. A quarrel calls for quick, sharp, staccato words, while a love-scene is best described in flowing, poetic words, full of musical vowels. Thus each situa-

tion and occasion may have a unity of its own, but all these minor unities must somehow be felt to be in harmony with each other for the creation of the larger unity of the whole. This harmony of all the parts for the producing of one impression is the crowning achievement of artistic technique. It requires both intellect and emotional power, working together. No coruscating beauties of style can compensate for a central deficiency in design.

What is it that thrills you as you look up at the massive towers of the Cathedral of Cologne? It is the superb unity of the structure, combined with its size; every line of the façade strikes the senses simultaneously with the same note of majesty. It is the same thing that makes you lay down "The Heart of Midlothian" and "The Cloister and the Hearth" with the conviction that you never can forget them.

Here we come upon the reason why no "purpose novel" — no story written primarily as a vehicle for religious, moral, or other didactic ideas — ever attains the highest rank. The extraneous purpose interferes with its unity. The author is trying to ride two horses to two separate goals

at the same time. As an artist his only legitimate purpose is the attainment of a noble artistic effect, and when he tries also to be a doctrinaire he must constantly be turning aside to produce didactic effects. Unity is sacrificed to wayside preaching. This in no wise contradicts the former statement that every great book has a moral meaning. It simply emphasizes the fact that this meaning must lie at the heart of the plot, not on its surface, and that the author should merely have it in his subconscious mind while writing.

Having emphasized the value of unity, let us now freely admit that the novelist has a wide range of freedom as regards the ornaments of his design. Just as the statues or bas-reliefs on the outside or inside of a cathedral have no structural function, — have nothing to do with holding up the roof or keeping the walls from spreading, — so there are in some novels many ornaments that have nothing to do with the action of the plot or even with the characters. Thackeray and Fielding often indulge in little soliloquies on life or on human nature in general, wandering away from their stories for the moment; and because these little essays are delightful in themselves,

we accept them with pleasure, even feeling that the book is enriched by them, though they are mere external ornaments, so far as the story is concerned. That even the impatient twentieth-century reader can enjoy digressions of this kind if they be alive with a congenial personality has been proved by "Joseph Vance," "Alice-for-Short," and the other long but charming novels of William De Morgan.

These extraneous observations of the novelist, indeed, may be multiplied until his book becomes merely an essay with a slender thread of plot running through it, as in "From a College Window," and other similar books of Arthur C. Benson. Thus the novel and the essay merge into each other on the contemplative side. But the two kinds of material must be harmonious in tone, and one must strongly predominate. To satisfy our sense of unity the book must be mostly essay, with the fiction serving merely as ornament, as in Mr. Benson's work; or it must be nearly all fiction, with the essay-matter for ornament, as in Thackeray's novels. A half-and-half mixture of intense action and leisurely ruminations would be exasperating.

How may we judge for ourselves whether a novel has unity or not? One good test is that of continuity of interest. Dull places usually are a sign of imperfect unity. But you never can judge a novel fully until you see what impression the ending makes upon you. The question here is, not whether you like it or not, but whether it is unforgettable or not. By the force, clearness, and lasting power of the book's total impression upon your mind you may judge its unity. These are subjective tests.

Now look at the book objectively. Can you glance back from the final catastrophe (even a wedding is a catastrophe in this sense — especially for the suitor who failed), can you look back through all the situations, and see a clear and logical connection between the final and the opening scenes? Have all the characters contributed in some way to the outcome? Are there any episodes that could have been omitted without losing a single stroke in the character-drawing, a single touch of color in the setting, a single link in the chain of cause and effect? These are some of the questions by which the unity of a novel may be measured.

One of the most perfect examples of unity in fiction is Mr. Hardy's "The Return of the Native." We have already seen how the action and all the characters are keyed to the low color-tones of the sombre heath. Note, too, how Clem Yeobright, Eustacia Vye, and all the minor characters talk like the simple country people they are, and are driven by the primitive passions of such natures. Mark how every situation seems to be the inevitable result of what has gone before; how every dialogue between the main characters carries the story forward; how every humorous colloquy lends color; how every scenic description deepens the meaning of the picture. So far as I can remember, there is not a single scene in the whole book that does not contribute in some way to a deeper and fuller understanding of the final grim catastrophe. You may not like the story for other reasons, but it is a model of good construction.

Unity in itself will not make a novel great if there be no greatness in the basic materials. There is many a little novel of the hour that can stand a closer analysis for unity than some of those that have lived and will live for generations. For perfection of plot Wilkie Collins's "The Moon-

stone" probably never has been surpassed; a very good story it is, too, but nobody would include it among the world's great novels. Plot and unity simply focus whatever greatness the materials may have in them. Neither Dickens nor Thackeray, nor yet George Eliot, was a complete master of plot, but the greatest works of each are the ones that most faithfully correlate all details to one ruling thought. The wider and deeper the human significance of this thought, the greater the book is likely to be.

VIII

STYLE AND SPIRIT

One needs to read only a few pages of Hall Caine's "The Deemster" and of Robert Louis Stevenson's "David Balfour," to perceive a marked difference in the literary qualities of the two books. The imagery and phrasing of the Manx novel affect one in a way that suggests the cold beauty of frost-work, while the verbal finish of the Scotch romance is more suggestive of rainbows and summer clouds floating in a blue sky. As you read on through "The Deemster" you encounter a chill air of deepening gloom from the inner recesses of the story, while out of the most strenuous events in "David Balfour" come sounds of laughter and the warm breath of romance. You close the one book, thoughtful, perhaps depressed. You close the other, merry hearted, perhaps more care-free than before.

The two books belong to two distinct classes of fiction, yet a large part of the difference is a matter of style. The one author deals habitually

in more sombre thoughts and images than the other. The difference is seen even in the surface shimmer, the external ornament of fancy and turn of phrase, the mere way of saying things, without reference to the events or the mental cast of the characters. For convenience and clearness let us use the word "style" to designate this outward iridescence, while for the deeper manifestations of the same thing we will use the word "spirit." By the spirit of a book I mean the sum total of the qualities that make up its philosophic and moral essence. Style is only one of the forms through which spirit makes itself manifest.

Style or literary quality may be defined crudely as the author's mode of expression, but it is more. At its best it is as elusive and vital an element in literature as grace in a woman or magnetism in a man, and its springs are found deep in the author's own personality. Every author has some sort of style, clear or obscure, simple or florid, good or bad; and perhaps the only definition that will cover every variety of good style is this: "The charm of manner that makes and keeps a book readable." It is no trick of word-juggling, but a spontaneous expression of the author's

character through the minor gestures of his imagination. Buffon summed it up when he said that "style is the man," though he used the word in the larger sense of spirit. It is easy to see why an attempt to use another man's style is always a failure. Any clever writer can make a recognizable imitation of Carlyle's rugged, tempestuous style, or of Macaulay's flowing periods, or of Swinburne's florid and melodious verse, but it will be only an imitation at best, a body without a soul.

Style at its best has beauty in it, thought under it, sincerity all through it, and character behind it. Verbal and imaginative beauty alone will not suffice to make and keep a book readable. The secret lies deeper, — in the author's personality. The subtlest aroma of style arises out of those little unconscious turns of thought and fancy which, like the unconscious little graces and impulses of a lovable woman, betray the noble soul within. It makes itself felt in the author's sense of form, in the rhythm of his periods, in his taste for refined imagery, in almost imperceptible shades of emotional and intellectual quality, in the instinctive harmonizing of the words with

the theme. It appeals subtly to all the reader's sensibilities. A perfect style has a musical cadence for the ear, pleasing imagery for the eye, emotional sincerity to touch the heart.

The lifelong struggle of the literary artist to perfect his mode of expression often leads him to forget the still greater importance of the thought expressed. Flaubert's attention was once called to an inconsistency in the words he was putting into the mouth of one of his peasant characters. "You 're right," said Flaubert, "only — I should have to alter my phrase." He preferred a clever phrase to truth of characterization. Perfect literary work must stand the test both of the ear and of the intellect. Sidney Lanier's remarkable sense of rhythm sometimes led him by the ear, so to speak, so that instead of a perfect union of sound and sense there is occasionally in his poems a mere chanting of syllables. Edgar Allan Poe, a master of style, used to assert that the end of a song is the perfection of its music, and that the chief value of imaginative prose is in the flawlessness of its rhythm. Read his prose or his poetry aloud and you will find it almost impossible to resist the charm of the inevitable word

and the inevitable accent. If perfection of workmanship could confer immortality, his works would have it. But the content of his tales is thin, meagre, morbid, and the style itself shows the same defects where his own personality comes to the surface; he lacked the primary ethical endowment in his own character to produce, beneath the surface graces of manner, that richer spirit and meaning which is needed to give an author the crown of greatness.

A good example of an easy, adequate, unforced, demurely satirical style is that which has kept Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" and "Sense and Sensibility" readable for a hundred years. Professor Richard Burton characterizes it very aptly in his "Masters of the English Novel":—

> Miss Austen's is not the style of startling tricks: nor has she the flashing felicities of a Stevenson which lead one to return to a passage for re-gustation. Her manner rarely if ever takes the attention from her matter. But her words and their marshaling (always bearing in mind her unambitious purpose) make as fit a garment for her thought as was ever devised upon English looms. If this is style, then Jane Austen possesses it as have very few of the race.

When an author's style is dominated by imagination or fancy, he is constantly leaving the main thought to bring in embellishing ideas or figures. Swinburne's earlier poetry is a striking example of a tropically imaginative style, often running to riotous excess. Unrestrained imagination produces florid or bombastic writing. A fine imagination under critical restraint produces the highest degree of stylic beauty, as instanced in Walter Pater's choice prose. At the same time Pater's "mincing gait" is not a good one for the student to imitate; his style is fitted only to his peculiar temperament.

If an author is controlled by his sensibilities, you will find him keenly alive to the beauties of nature and the gentler aspects of life. His style becomes warm, glowing, pictorial, with a dancing brilliancy of surface-coloring, as in the case of Tennyson's poems. Sensibility in excess, of course, becomes sentimentalism. "Nothing too much" is the golden rule of art. Ruskin's prose is a fine example of a style growing out of a well-balanced emotional temperament. Ruskin is a good author to read for phrases and imagery, though not for sentence-construction; his sentences are too long.

When the logical faculty holds the reins, the style is simple, direct, plain. Hardy's novels are a good example. Force of intellect and a well-poised judgment produce a clear, strenuous, unwavering style, with little color — like Macaulay's. When force of character and depth of conviction are joined to a stormy emotional nature they are likely to produce a nervous, gnarled, trip-hammer style such as Carlyle's.

The success or failure of an essay or poem depends largely upon the pleasing nature of the style — upon the flowers of fancy with which the wayside is strewn. The popular success of a novel depends little upon style in this sense, but the savor of style is the salt that makes the story "keep" after it has once won a public. The subtle beauties of a good style are mostly lost upon the uncultured reader. Mr. Howells is perhaps the most delightful stylist we have had in America, and it is the kindly piquancy and whimsical humor of his inexhaustible fancies that will keep his novels alive long after many a more exciting tale has been buried and forgotten; yet Mr. Howells is by no means the most popular of our novelists, — even of our best novelists, —

which is but another way of saying that the most delicate flowers of fancy and the shrewdest observation or psychological insight cannot fill the place of dramatic narrative for the average reader.

Dramatic action and a fanciful style do not go well together; the embellishments are too liable to hinder the flow of the story. This is the trouble with George Meredith's fiction, though, happily, his fancies are so supremely pithy as to be worth while in themselves. But artificial mannerisms such as Maurice Hewlett affects in "The Forest Lovers," for instance, tend to weaken the narrative. The reader, impatient for events, feels inclined to exclaim, "If you are going to tell a story, tell it, and don't wait to do a song and dance with every sentence." You will find no "brocaded style" in the greatest novels. Even Stevenson, who is a master of words, tells his stories in a direct manner quite different from that of his essays.

In general, it may be said that the felicity of phrase and metaphor most to be desired in fiction is of the kind that devotes itself to helping the reader's mind to grasp the characters and situations more completely and see them more vividly.

For the rest, the subject is admirably summed up by John Burroughs in his essay on "Style and the Man," which closes with this exhortation: "In treating of nature and outdoor themes, let the style have limpidness, sweetness, freshness; in criticism let it have dignity, lucidity, penetration; in history let it have mass, sweep, comprehension; in all things let it have vitality, sincerity, genuineness."

Now let us glance at the larger aspect of the subject, — the spirit of a book.

Have you ever paused to wonder why half a dozen artists may all paint good portraits of the same person, or good views of the same landscape, without making any two of the pictures alike? It is because every artist sees the world through his own personality, as through tinted spectacles, and no two souls are exactly alike in spiritual color. Each paints things as he sees them. Thus every work of art becomes a representation of an object or objects *plus* the artist's personality, — his temperament, his intellectual force, his culture, his religion, his philosophy, his love of his fellow men, his attitude toward the things that are evil and the things that are lovely and of good report.

All these elements of personality, taken together, determine a man's view of life, — determine the color of the world as seen through his eyes, — and this color will inevitably affect his written and spoken utterances. Thus the cheery and sprightly temperament of Stevenson produces a literature quite different in hue from that which comes through Hall Caine's more sombre cast of mind.

It is the method of art to represent an object or scene by choosing only significant details from among its many characteristics, and no two artists will choose exactly the same details, because the eye of each is drawn to something different, according to his personality. The same is true of authors: each seizes upon his pen the aspects of life that seem to him most significant or artistic. And it is this personal element that creates the spirit of a book, breathing life, emotion, and moral meaning into the raw materials. In a novel it affects the characters, plot, motives, even the setting. It shows itself in the author's choice of materials, but most of all is it apparent in his manner of handling them. You will find it revealed in his choice of words and forming the essence of his style.

Some writers put themselves into their books much more than others. Thackeray and Dickens let you feel their own personalities frequently, Poe and Turgeñev seldom. Bacon keeps himself out of his essays as much as possible; Gilbert K. Chesterton never lets you forget himself for a moment. It is only a matter of degree, however; in every author's writings there is something of his inner self revealed in his outlook on life. It is this intangible element that makes a good book really the "precious life-blood of a master-spirit," as Milton has said. "For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve, as in a vial, the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them."

"Literature," says Pater, "is the representation of fact connected with soul." An author's mode of presenting such fact will be affected by his attitude toward nature, man, and God. If he has in his own character that mystic union of pure ideals and quickening emotion which we call spirituality, the spirit of his work will in itself be an element of beauty, as in the essays of

Emerson and the novels of Charles Kingsley. If his own ideals are low, they will reveal themselves in the vulgar spirit of whatsoever he writes. No brilliancy of technique or style can redeem a story inspired by a false or baneful view of life. Such a spirit is incapable of the best art.

Here is the secret of the fundamental difference between the novels of Balzac and those of Dickens. Both men have great imaginations, but Balzac is drawn toward the ugly things of life, its dirt, disease, its sinister tragedy; while Dickens, moving through the same regions, is drawn toward the more beautiful, clean, hopeful aspects of things.

Balzac's dominant motive seems to be a worship of force, — especially evil force, — and his view of the whirlpool of life seems devoid of faith in what Stevenson calls "the ultimate decency of things." Dickens is ruled always by sympathy, by faith in his fellow men, by a reasonable trust in the power of love and virtue to triumph over evil. With Balzac it is usually wickedness that triumphs, martyring the good beneath its ruthless heel. This happens so constantly in his fiction that the total effect is not only unpleasant as art but also false to life. The difference in spirit is sufficient in it-

self to explain why American and English readers prefer Dickens to Balzac.

The novels of Hardy and Meredith present a somewhat similar contrast. Hardy's view of life is fatalistic, and the spirit of his work is more or less gloomy, after the manner of Greek tragedy. The struggles of his characters in the grip of relentless Fate seem to be shaped by a philosophy of despair. The Mayor of Casterbridge, like Tess D'Urberville, goes down to ruin and death under the impact of vindictive circumstance rather than through any great fault or sin of his own. The spirit of Hardy's work is the opposite of Browning's, so that it might be epitomized by altering Browning's lines to read: —

> God 's not in His heaven;
> All's wrong with the world.

Meredith's view of life, on the other hand, is hopeful, tonic, full of faith in the nobility and efficacy of struggle. His characters mostly come out of their troubles stronger, wiser, benefited at last even by their own errors. Richard Feverel's ordeal makes him more of a man. Wilfrid Pole acquires some stamina before he gets through with the consequences of his vacillation in "San-

dra Belloni." Evan Harrington, in the fine novel that bears his name, embodies the author's faith in manliness and honor, just as his sisters embody the author's contempt for the false pride of the "kingdom of Gilt Gingerbread," and it is Evan's manliness that wins. The philosophy of all Meredith's work is the most hopeful and inspiring that has yet been shaped by any literary artist out of the new evolutionary theory of life. His style is more obscure than Hardy's, his technique is less perfect, but his spirit is brighter and more satisfying.

Thus in every author's works you will find his own distinctive style, — grave, sunny, sombre, flashing, austere, or laughing, as his own nature may be; and so long as his art is true and his spirit sincere, he is likely to be worth reading, though perhaps not suitable for every mood. Ibsen and Hardy are for moments when the flood of life and hope is running strong, when one can get the tonic effect of their intellectual stimulus without having one's spirits lowered unduly by their sombre tone. Even then it is not quite necessary to take the point of view of the club-woman who, according to Professor Burton, was overheard exclaim-

ing to a kindred worshiper: "Oh, is n't Ibsen just *lovely!* He does so take the hope out of life!"

If an author's style has distinction of any kind it will make you wish to read his book again. If his spirit is of the highest, he will make you feel that you have been in communion with one of "those deathless minds," as Shelley said, "which leave, when they have passed, a path of light."

IX

MORALITY IN ART

In discussing an author's spirit we run squarely upon the mooted question of morals in art. Is an author or artist as responsible as the rest of us for the welfare of society? Should not beauty of form be his sole and sufficient aim? Have morals any legitimate connection with art?

On the one hand we confront the good but mistaken folk who would make of art nothing but a drudge-horse to carry burdens of religious or ethical instruction to the heathen of a differing creed. On the other we have the clique of European artists and critics who, under the meaningless banner of "Art for art's sake," contend that art has nothing whatever to do with morals. One extreme bears fruit in the preachy "purpose novel," the old-fashioned Sunday-school tale, or the morbid religious sentimentalism of such books as "The Wide, Wide World," which our grandmothers found more to their taste than we do to ours. The other extreme produces fiction such

as that of Maupassant, in whose otherwise artistic pages there is no faintest glimmer of moral sense. Both theories are fatally wrong. Yet each to a certain extent is right. Let us see if we can draw the rather difficult line where it belongs.

There is a passage in Charles Dudley Warner's life of Irving that bears intimately upon this subject. It is in itself such a fine example of a fine literary spirit that one may be pardoned for quoting it entire.

I cannot bring myself [says Mr. Warner] to exclude Irving's moral quality from a literary estimate. There is something that made Scott and Irving personally loved by the millions of their readers, who had only the dimmest idea of their personality. This was some quality perceived in what they wrote. Each one can define it for himself; there it is, and I do not see why it is not as integral a part of the authors — an element in the estimate of their future position — as what we term their intellect, their knowledge, their skill, or their art. However you rate it, you cannot account for Irving's influence in the world without it.

In his tender tribute to Irving the great-hearted Thackeray, who saw as clearly as anybody the place of mere literary art in the sum total of life, quoted the dying words of Scott to Lockhart: "Be a good man, my dear." We know well enough that the great

author of "The Newcomes" and the great author of "The Heart of Midlothian" recognized the abiding value in literature of integrity, sincerity, purity, charity, faith. These are beneficences, and Irving's literature, walk around it and measure it by whatever critical instruments you will, is a benevolent literature.

The author loved good women and little children and a pure life; he had faith in his fellow men, a kindly sympathy with the lowest, without any subservience to the highest; he retained a belief in the possibility of chivalrous actions, and did not care to envelop them in a cynical suspicion; he was an author still capable of an enthusiasm. His books are wholesome, full of sweetness and charm, of humor without any sting, amusement without any stain; and their more solid qualities are marred by neither pedantry nor pretension.

It is evident that a book which — other things being equal — radiates this benevolent influence is better art than one which has a sinister influence on the reader. It possesses an additional element of beauty, — the beauty of goodness. It gives just so much more pleasure, genuine, lasting pleasure, and to that degree is the greater art. Art, then, *has* something to do with morals. The thoughtful reader wishes his novels to mean something, and to mean something good.

Perfect art, according to Anglo-Saxon standards, calls for three cardinal elements, — the beautiful, the true, the good. From generation to generation the fiction-reading masses of England and America refuse to take to their hearts any book that does not in some form breathe forth goodwill to men — faith in the things that make for greater human happiness. The desire to see the innocent prevail over the guilty, the good over the bad, even in the crudest melodrama, is as instinctive as the desire to see something happen. This moral instinct in the masses is one of the deepest and soundest traits of human nature, and any theory of art that ignores it is built upon the sand. The laws of morality have a place in the architectonics of literature, along with the laws of form and verisimilitude.

Literature that makes unlawful love seductive, that tends to encourage robbery or murder, that makes a jest of purity and the homely virtues, that arouses lachrymose sympathy not only for the sinner but for his sin, as some of Oscar Wilde's plays do, is not good art, nor can any amount of technical skill or brilliancy of style make it such. The tendency to which such books pander is, as

Holman Hunt has said, "the canker that must wreck all high art, and in certain course precipitate the ruin of its nation."

Yet it is certain, on the other hand, that a novelist's art is injured the moment moral instruction — or any other kind of instruction — begins to be his chief aim. George Eliot, whose clear-sighted moral earnestness is an element of her greatness, began to lose some of her power as an artist after "Adam Bede"; in "Middlemarch" and "Daniel Deronda" we feel that the problem comes first and the story second. Kant and Goethe were right when they held that the beautiful, purposive as it may seem to us, cannot be made to serve any particular purpose without injury to the artistic effect.

The normal aim of the artist is beauty, not instruction. Puritanism, which is essentially didactic, may create upright men and women, but it kills art. It was only after the softening and decline of New England Puritanism that we could have even the severely moral fictions of "The Scarlet Letter" and "The Marble Faun."

Here we touch the dividing line that we have been looking for. The people are right when they

demand that their novels shall mean something good, but this meaning must not be allowed to overshadow or usurp the place of the beauty and true-seeming which are the essence of art. It belongs to the spirit of the story, not to its technique. In fact, the moral meaning which is most effective in fiction is that which springs unconsciously from the author's own character and ideals, making itself felt at the heart of the work without becoming visible as a deliberate purpose. For the rest, Henry James states the case with characteristic insight when he says: "Morality is simply a part of the essential richness of inspiration — it has nothing to do with the artistic process, and it has everything to do with the artistic effect. The more a work of art feels it at its source, the richer it is; the less it feels it, the poorer it is."

So morality has a good deal to do with art, but should have little to do with the artist's conscious purpose. "It is the business of literature to represent life," as one critic has said, "and life is a moral affair;" but the novelist must be free to bring out his thought for its beauty's sake, not for the sake of any ulterior lesson, not for the

advancement of any code or creed. If this beauty has moral health in it and behind it, there will be no need for moralizing. "All true art from the beginning has served to uplift the soul and give strength to noble resolves."

How can the ordinary reader tell whether a book is morally sound or not? Chiefly by noting whether or not its tendency is to impel toward evil. There are two good tests, — the author's attitude toward evil and good, and the final effect of the book upon the reader. A story that deals with crime and debauchery — that leaves a bad taste or a mephitic odor behind it — may be immoral or not, according to the spirit in which the unlovely materials are handled. Zola's "L'Assommoir" is abominably unpleasant, and in this respect is poor art, but it is not a book that will lure any one to embrace the evils it portrays. Its morals are redeemed by the author's evident and infectious hatred of vice. The frequent touches of coarseness in Kipling's stories and poems are merely provoking offenses against good taste. On the other hand, Sudermann's "Das Hohe Lied" is both vile in taste and immoral in the logic of its ending; it leaves the reader with a nauseous

feeling of having been dipped into a cesspool for no good reason.

The greatest literature, of course, may revolve about the basest crimes. "Othello" and "King Lear" deal with despicable human passions, yet their moral tone is high; indeed, it is Shakespeare's sure-footedness in moral issues that helps to make his greatness. Again, no book can be more pure of heart than "The Scarlet Letter," though it deals with the results of adultery. Sterne, with his Peeping Tom innuendoes, may be more nasty in an unfinished sentence than Tolstoy in the whole history of an Anna Karénina. It is all a matter of the light in which the evil and good are presented, the author's attitude toward them, the meanings and emotions that he causes them to convey to the reader.

If the author exhibits no moral sense in the presence of matters of right and wrong, his work may be merely unmoral and harmless, like Mr. Locke's "The Morals of Marcus Ordeyne"; or it may be harmless for mature readers and poisonous for the immature, like Mr. Hornung's "gentleman burglar" stories; or it may be unwittingly immoral, like Gabriele D'Annunzio's tragedy of

"La Gioconda," which, though it contains no lines that may not fitly be read aloud in a mixed company, leaves the harrowed reader with an ugly feeling that might be put into some such words as these: "Life, after all, is a chaos of injustice; it does not pay to be faithful, pure, and brave; I might as well follow the example of La Gioconda, who, by her black sins, got what she wanted and apparently was happy."

This is the trouble with the artistic product of the author who has no moral instinct to serve as an unseen guide when he goes forth on the free quest for beauty: his work so easily lapses into passive or active immorality, leaving the taint of decay at the core of it.

If an author views evil cynically, or makes it appear seductive, or treats it as a peep-show, pandering to the reader's baser passions, his book may be called actively immoral. The same is true if he shapes the events of his plot so as to exalt a criminal and his crime. Here, for instance, is a recent romance that engages the sympathy of the reader for a bloody villain, a wrecker, whose barbaric splendor has been secured at the cost of hundreds of innocent lives, and whom the author

rewards with the filial love and devotion of the heroine. The result is bad art. The high light is in the wrong place. The situation is not beautiful because it is not good. In so far as Taine is just in his sweeping indictment of Balzac, his words offer a valid moral test. He says: —

> Balzac regards society as a conflict of egoisms, where force guided by cunning triumphs, where blind and violent passion forces the dikes which we oppose to it, where the accepted morality consists in apparent respect for convention and for the law. This melancholy and dangerous view of life is enhanced by the fact that he fashions his men of genius out of criminals, and that in laying down the theory of vice he makes it unconsciously interesting and excusable, that he paints in dull colors elevated and refined sentiments, while he portrays admirably the emotions of gross and base natures. Besides, this acrid philosophy lacks its natural counterpoise, history, which he knew badly.

For a century English and American fiction has been extremely reticent, not to say prudish, in its treatment of sex-questions; but since the appearance of Hardy's "Tess" and "Jude the Obscure" there has been a somewhat startling tendency toward greater frankness. The situation is fairly hit off by the current jest concerning the

care that daughters have to take in choosing the books which their mothers may read. The question here, to a certain extent, is a matter of taste. So far as mature readers are concerned, the limits of what is permissible may fairly be settled by the standard that distinguishes between the nude in art and the naked in art. The literature of nearly all continental Europe is more outspoken than ours, thus often offending our taste, but this fact in itself does not make such books immoral. Tolstoy, in "Anna Karénina," says a few things that we would leave unsaid, — things that repel us with a needless brutality of truth, — but the intense moral earnestness of the author makes itself felt throughout the book. The same sort of theme, in the hands of Maupassant, in spite of his more exquisite style, becomes morally repulsive; a robe of purple cannot conceal carrion.

The difference is simply that the Russian is filled with a desire for the welfare of his fellow men and women, while the Frenchman is not. The one, in the presence of a moral issue, is earnest; the other is cynical. We feel a moral law underlying and giving intelligent direction to events in Tolstoy's stories; we feel the absence of any

such law in the stories of Maupassant and in the average French novel of illicit love. A novelist has a right to portray the ulcers of society, but the law of sound art demands that he shall not do it flippantly, needlessly, or without a sense of its bearing on human welfare.

We have, perhaps, been a trifle prudish in the past; now we seem in some danger of going to the other and far worse extreme. In the mass of current fiction one too frequently comes across novels into which nasty or salacious episodes are lugged for no apparent reason other than that of sheer sensationalism. They serve no artistic purpose. The only end they serve is of the basest, — the selling of more copies of the book by appealing to prurient curiosity. No condemnation is too severe for such novels or for the literary jackals that write them.

It is not necessary that the light novel of the hour, meant only for entertainment, should have any particular ethical lesson in it; it has served its purpose if it has given us harmless diversion. But even a light and ephemeral novel is the richer for having back of it something more than the mere desire to entertain. Manzoni, whose "I Promessi

Sposi" is the best historical romance that has yet come out of Italy, voiced the spirit which — when dominated by the artistic impulse — creates the kind of fiction most worth reading. He said: "If literature had no higher aim than the amusement of people who are always amusing themselves, it would be the vilest, most frivolous of professions, and I would search for some manlier employment than this aping the mountebank. . . . If while you were reading this book you have never been moved by a feeling of reprobation for wickedness, and of reverence for piety, nobleness, humanity, and justice, the publication of this book has been useless indeed."

We come back, then, to the subjective test mentioned in the first chapter: "Does the book leave any kind of wholesome or fine feeling in the mind of one who reads it?" There are as many varieties of such feeling as there are facets of the human soul, but in every case the feeling is easily recognized as one of refining potency. You know instinctively that the story is one which any man or woman will be the better for reading.

This impressionistic test — the effect of the book upon the reader — seems to be the only one

broad and sensitive enough to apply to all books. In the hands of readers without delicate feelings or pure ideals, of course, it will fail; but so will any other. All standards, too, will produce false and narrow judgments in the hands of persons with narrow or ill-balanced views of life. It is well to remember that by our judgments we shall ourselves be judged.

If you hold a penny close enough to your eye, it looms larger than the world. If you hold a pet idea close enough to the mind's eye, it will hide everything else. A fanatical abolitionist might declare More's "Utopia" immoral because it admits slavery into its ideal republic. A fanatical temperance reformer might condemn all Dickens's novels to be burned by the common hangman because they have a good deal of convivial drinking in them. Still another might denounce Ibsen's plays because they present social problems from a point of view other than that of the hypocritical-conventional standards. Such criticism merely proclaims the critic's own narrowness of horizon. A moral standard, to be of any use in literary criticism, should be as broad as the spirit of the authors to whom it is applied.

X

REALISM AND ROMANTICISM

WHAT is the difference between a novel and a romance? How can we recognize the romantic touch when we see it, how distinguish it from the realistic motive in the fiction we read?

As Henry James has said, it is as difficult to trace the dividing line between the real and the romantic as to plant a milestone between north and south. The two merge indistinguishably into each other, often giving place to each other from moment to moment in the same story. Yet north and south stand for distinct ideas, and so do realism and romanticism. The difference is most easily seen by examining the nature of their respective effects upon the mind.

The indispensable quality of any fiction is that it shall entertain, that it shall give pleasure of some kind; but there are innumerable ways in which it may do this, innumerable facets of our minds and hearts to which it may appeal. The interest of Miss Austen's "Pride and Prejudice"

is quite different from that of Dumas's "The Three Guardsmen," while that of Meredith's "Diana of the Crossways" is in some respects diverse from either. We read Kipling for his striking phrases and vivid imagery, Poe for his technique and style, Stevenson for his deathless spirit of youth, Hardy for his tragic verity, Howells for his genial, quizzical, infallible observations of the surface traits of American character.

Now compare a typical novel, such as Trollope's "Barchester Towers," with a typical romance, such as Stevenson's "Treasure Island," and the difference will at once be apparent. Trollope gives us a story that is true to English life and character, while Stevenson amuses us in an entirely different way — by carrying us off to sea and into an unreal world of marvelous adventure. The one book seeks to portray the usual, the other the unusual. The one is a novel, "a fictitious narrative in which the characters, scenes, and incidents are in keeping with the ordinary train of events in society;" the other is a romance, a narrative that gets its charm by placing its characters in the midst of events and environment quite different from every-day life.

The novel, in other words, is realistic fiction, aiming to interest us by revealing new truth or beauty in familiar things, — in real life as we know it, — in the minds and hearts of people essentially like ourselves. Its action, therefore, should be probable at every point, its characters natural, its setting true to material realities in detail and general effect. Its success lies in making the reader exclaim, "How true!"

Jane Austen, Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot, George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Mr. Howells, Mr. James, Mrs. Wharton — all these are realists in the large sense indicated. There is a wide difference between Dickens, with his grotesqueries, sentiment, optimism, and Hardy's sombre and accurate realism; but both belong to the same school, in that both are trying to produce an illusion of real life, letting us look into the familiar yet ever mysterious human heart and exclaim, "How true!"

The romancer, on the other hand, troubles himself not a great deal with facts. He scorns everyday life as too prosaic for his purposes, and turns deliberately to the uncommon, the colossal, the unfamiliar and mysterious, even though it be

something that never was on sea or land. His success lies in making us exclaim, "How strange! How surprising!"

He may keep quite close to real life, as Scott and Hawthorne did, using only the merest touch of romanticism; or he may lay his scenes in a mystical No Man's Land, as Rider Haggard has, or in the moon or beneath the seas, as Jules Verne did; but in so far as he is a true romancer he is more interested in the unusual than in the natural. The essence of his art is the adding of strangeness to beauty — in its extreme forms mingling the mysterious and grandiose with the grotesquely bizarre. His preference is for a rosy-hued world of imagination, where heroes may be incredibly strong and heroines unspeakably beautiful, and where there is elbow-room for people to do various unusual and surprising things. The romantic spirit can create such a world in the heart of present-day London, New York, or Chicago; but, like a butterfly among chimney-tops, it is likely to be ill at ease there; in close quarters it feels, as did Mr. Pickwick when he whopped a boy in a hansom cab, that its style is hampered; it usually prefers to work behind dim curtains of time

and distance; it is always ranging abroad for new motives, new subjects of interest, new forms of expression. It often runs to excess, but it is the revivifying spirit of literature. Anthony Hope's "The Prisoner of Zenda" is a first-rate example of what this spirit is doing at the present time in the way of popular entertainment.

The romantic is the untamed spirit of youth, in perennial conflict with classicism, the old and perfected forms. The charm of classical literature is that of the well-known tale to which we can listen over and over again, because, like Kipling's "Just So" stories, it is told in exactly the right words to produce a finished artistic effect. "To the absolute beauty of its artistic form," as Walter Pater has said, "is added the accidental, tranquil charm of familiarity. It comes to us out of the cool and quiet of other times, as the measure of what long experience has shown will at least never displease us." The realism of our own day is gradually hardening into a new classicism before our eyes, in the deft hands of such writers as Mrs. Humphry Ward and Mr. Howells, and it would soon lose its vitality if it were not for the constant

incursions of the ruder, fresher, more untamable, emotional spirit of romanticism. Nor would the latest psychological movement under the leadership of such novelists as Henry James, important though it is, be enough to save realistic fiction from decay; for psychological analysis is merely intellectual, whereas the soul of art is emotional. And this brings us back to romance.

Sir Walter Scott, of course, is the creator and still unrivaled master of the historical romance. Yet his method is so realistic, so true to life, that his stories may as justly be called novels as romances. The element of wonder in them, so far as it exists, lies in the unfamiliar historical setting, with its clash of ancient arms and brave pageantry of mediæval trappings. In our own day Stevenson has created a more romantic kind of romance, more modern in spirit, more adventurous in theme, permeated with more of the reckless dash of Dumas, and leading the way for a whole school of popular romancers, — Stanley Weyman, Anthony Hope, Conan Doyle, Marion Crawford, and, on this side of the Atlantic, Winston Churchill, Mary Johnston, Weir Mitchell, Robert W. Chambers, and a host of others. A large share

of the light fiction of the last decade or two is the fruit of this new romantic impulse.

The great romantic movement that swept Europe in the nineteenth century, however, went deeper than mere adventure and mystery for its primal impulse. Poetry, drama, painting, music, all forms of art were affected by it. The distinguishing trait of this almost universal revolt against classicism, which began with Goethe's "Sorrows of Werther" and culminated in Hugo's "Les Misérables," was emotional self-revelation — the revolt of the individual against his environment. It secured the effect of romantic wonder by invading a new realm of passion. Romanticism is the renovating spirit in art, as opposed to the conservative spirit of classicism. Compare the hard, intellectual, impersonal poetry of Pope with the warm, passionate, selfish, egoistic, self-revealing poetry of Byron, and you will see that the chief difference lies in Byron's outpouring of his personal feelings.

The human passions, wild, varied, often ungoverned, coloring with their violence the whole world in which their conflicts were waged — these became the one theme of the new school of poets,

dramatists, and novelists. The result was a sentimental literature full of romantic surprises, even when genius gave it a realistic setting, as in Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre." The very word "romance" became a synonym for a sensational love-story, and to-day it is still used to designate the love-and-adventure fiction of the masses. But the true meaning of romance is not sentiment, nor yet exciting adventure, but simply the sense of something new, out of the ordinary range of life as we know it. Always the romantic is the thing that happens in the unexplored realm of dreams, beyond the Alps, in some Italy of the imagination, where the sun is ever shining and where life is more strange and beautiful than in the prosaic world around us. Pessimism cannot exist in the land of romance.

Henry James, whose sympathies are not romantic, has described the exhilarating aloofness of romance by the use of an ingenious figure. The balloon of experience, he says, is tied to the earth by the long rope of probability, and under that balloon we swing in the car of the imagination; the art of the romancer is, for the fun of it, insidiously to cut the cable without our detecting him. From

that moment we swing apart from the globe, utterly unrelated, remaining as exhilarated as we like, especially when all goes well.

Mr. James's implication, I suppose, is that when all does not go well, we are like to come back to earth with an unpleasant thud. This is, indeed, the test of romance, — the author's power to keep us under the spell of that "willing suspension of disbelief" which is necessary to the enjoyment of all imaginative art. Whenever a romance ceases to seem real according to its own laws it is a failure. When by the magic of the necessary words the author keeps you convinced, as Jules Verne does in "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea," the romance is a good one of its kind, though the kind may not be the most important. The best romantic work done in our language since Scott is that of Robert Louis Stevenson. He was a psychologist, a master of motive, a delineator of character, a delightful stylist, as well as a rare hand at telling a good romantic yarn. His "Kidnapped," "David Balfour," "The Master of Ballantrae" and "The Ebb-Tide," are worthy the time of any lover of genuine literature. Sour scientific critics may say, as Brunetière did, that

romanticism is "the ardor of incorrectness," but the popular taste for romantic literature is as universal and legitimate as the taste for sunshine and vacations.

Yet the art that reveals truth is of a higher order than that which merely inspires wonder, and it is to the realistic motive, not the romantic, that we owe the majority of our greatest works of fiction. The one eternal subject of human interest is the outcome of human actions. Even in the great romances, such as "Les Misérables" and "The Heart of Midlothian," the chief charm is in the things that are forever true rather than in what is romantically strange. The depicting of human character in action is the supreme end of fiction, and the realistic method, under certain conditions, attains this end most successfully.

The stream of realistic fiction of action and manners may fairly be said to have had its source in the novels of Henry Fielding, notably in his "Tom Jones," a century and a half ago. Though a strain of coarseness in Fielding's work offends the more refined taste of our age, it was from him that Thackeray got his literary method. But the first perfect realistic artist was Jane Austen,

whose "Sense and Sensibility" and other novels remain to-day unrivaled as true and delicate etchings of a limited phase of English rural life. A third of a century later came Dickens, master of them all, followed by Thackeray, George Eliot, George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, on down through the lengthening line of English realists to Eden Phillpotts, Mrs. Humphry Ward, John Galsworthy, and others of our own time.

Suppose you get hold of a novel that purports to be realistic, but that makes its characters act absurdly. Is this, then, a romance? By no means; it is merely melodrama — overstrained and unnatural drama of the would-be serious sort. Both the realist and the romancer lapse into melodrama when they miss the illusion of truth; but we allow the romancer the wider latitude in this respect. Hawthorne's reason, frankly stated, for calling "The Scarlet Letter" a romance, was to avail himself of the somewhat larger license, thus implied, in dealing with the events of life. Yet he drew so little upon this privilege that the book might with justice be called a short psychological novel. The writer of comedy also may take some liberties with the probabilities, but as soon as he

violates them altogether he lapses into farce. Both melodrama and farce have their uses, but they always are of the lower forms of art.

When a writer's aim is to depict things as he thinks they ought to be, rather than as they really are, he is an idealist. "Looking Backward" is an idealistic purpose-romance. Romanticism and idealism both depart from the real, but the one goes in quest of the marvelous, the other in pursuit of the perfect. Idealism in literature, however, is an atmosphere rather than a method, and it may pervade the realistic novel as well as the dashing romance, or be absent from both. All the work of Mr. Howells, the leading American realist, is pervaded by a genial atmosphere of idealism, set aglow by the light from the silver lining of his New England conscience. On the other hand, Ibsen and Hardy, stark realists, keep their ideals out of sight and present the facts of life without a hint of how its evils may be bettered. Dickens is fairly bursting with ideals of social betterment, many of which he pauses to fight for in the course of his stories; Balzac, on the contrary, seems to have no ideals. Victor Hugo, greatest of French romanticists, is as full of hu-

manitarian idealism as Dickens or Howells. Zola's realism likewise came to be hitched to an ideal of social reform, but the cargo of his artistic cart was too odorous to be pleasing. In brief, idealism may animate any kind of art, becoming, under proper conditions, an element of strength and long life in the work it illumines.

The truest realism includes the ideal. The art that merely photographs things as they are in one age must die with that age and be forgotten by all save the archæologist. "Not so is it with the art which the poet has touched. The ideal has entered into it, and in so doing it has imbued it with the indestructibility of spirit." This fact, pointed out by Felix E. Schelling in his work on the Elizabethan drama, will in itself go far toward explaining the superior vitality of Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot.

What of realistic fiction that manages to be more odious than reality? In so far as it is not mere obscene catering to the brute in man, — a hanging up of the old tavern sign, "Entertainment Here for Man and Beast," — it is the fruit of a mistaken theory, a theory that confuses science with art. Zola did all that could be done

with this artistic method, leading a movement that made realism a synonym for unpleasantness; but its failure is now quite generally conceded, even in France. We turn in disgust from Zola's "pitiless disemboweling of life and the dangling of its convulsive viscera before the agonized spectators." The ugly has its uses among the materials of art, but it must be subservient to the beautiful. Even fiction such as that of George Moore, Guy de Maupassant, or the uncleanly Baudelaire, though externally polished and seductive, has at its heart a canker, a deliberate ugliness of spirit, that will speedily kill it.

The scientific spirit of our age is profoundly influencing our literature. We demand a greater degree of probability, even in our romantic fiction, than our grandfathers did. Realism has taught romanticism to be reasonable. In the Middle Ages a romancer could cut off the head of his hero and restore it by a miracle without a protest from the enchanted reader. To-day we will not even let him restore a lock of the heroine's golden hair without explaining how it came to be so suspiciously detachable. The tendency is toward a closer conformity with facts, though our prefer-

ence is still, I am glad to say, for truth seen through a mellow atmosphere of pure and hopeful ideals.

The latest phase of realism — that of psychological analysis — is a modern elaboration of a method that may be traced away back to Richardson's "Pamela," the first modern novel ever written. It was first perfected as a distinct literary method in the early decades of the nineteenth century by Henri Beyle, a French genius who wrote under the name of Stendhal. This style of fiction devotes itself to dissecting the inner workings of the minds and hearts of its characters. Dickens did not trouble himself or his readers with any discussion of what mental processes made Mr. Peggotty go out to seek little Em'ly through the world, or with any analysis of what Pecksniff thought about his own hypocrisy, or of how Mr. Carker felt when he showed his teeth, or of why Captain Cuttle did the things that made him lovable. But George Meredith, Henry James, Mrs. Wharton, and other leading fictionists of our day prefer to turn the minds of their characters inside out, inviting us to come and examine their healthy or diseased tissues

under the microscope. The interest of such a clinic is intellectual rather than emotional, and one's liking of it is a matter of taste.

Psychological analysis has a legitimate place among the novelist's materials, but it is merely internal description, and like any other kind of description it kills interest if used too abundantly. "The Egoist" is not Meredith's best novel. The novels that will be read longest by the largest number of intelligent men and women are those in which the author keeps most of his analysis in his own mind and puts down the results in the form of living characters seen in action. This is the only kind of fiction that can get past the brain into the emotions, where we really live.

Rossetti, in one of his flashes of genius, once said that the two vital elements in all fiction are "the sympathy" and "the tragic mischief." The author must first arouse our sympathy, must make us care what happens to his chief characters, and then must stir our feelings by making us see these people caught in the grip of circumstance and trying to fight their way out. These two things are the prime test of both realistic and romantic fiction. If the author fails to do either

one of them, it will matter little whether his method has aimed at making us cry, "How true!" or whisper, "How strange!" for we will merely say, "How dull!"

In realistic and romantic fiction alike the chief tests of excellence are these: Are the characters alive, natural, sufficiently true to human nature to make one feel interested in their fate? Is the action such that one can believe it, at least while reading the story? Has the book revealed any new depth of beauty in human nature, or has it at least entertained you with a beautiful dream of romantic imagination? If yes, then it is good for something. If no, then it is good for nothing.

XI

THE SHORT STORY

A SHORT story is not merely a "young novel." It is a distinct and perfect form of fiction, built on a plan of its own, and must be judged by standards of its own. To a large degree it is an American product, Poe and Bret Harte having done much to shape its development along the lines now prevailing on both sides of the Atlantic.

The short story bears the same relation to the novel that a solitaire diamond ring bears to a diamond brooch. Both are made from the same kind of materials, but the one is simple in effect, the other complex, and perfect workmanship in either case requires the highest skill. The degree of difference in their make-up is indicated by the fact that few writers have been able to attain full success in both.

The first test of a short story, of course, is its power to hold one's interest. But the great majority of magazine stories, even of the interesting

ones, are not worth reading a second time — are not good enough to collect into book form. What do they lack? What are the qualities in the chosen few that make them survive and win a place in our literature? In the main the vital qualities are the same that we have been dissecting in the novel. Human nature, novelty or dramatic force of plot, vivacity and distinction of style, insight and depth of thought or feeling, and, still more, a certain emotional or imaginative richness both in the story and in the author's manner of telling it — these are among the chief qualities that distinguish a good short story from a poor one.

The difference between a short story and a tale is significant: a tale has little or no plot, while the distinguishing trait of the story is its plot, its organization about one dramatic point. Mr. J. Berg Esenwein, in his excellent book on "Writing the Short Story," sums up all the chief characteristics of this species of fiction as follows:

"A short story is a brief, imaginative narrative, unfolding a single predominating incident and a single chief character; it contains a plot, the details of which are so compressed, and the whole

treatment so organized, as to produce a single impression."

This single impression may be produced chiefly through the leading character, or the plot, or the setting, or the spirit; but in every case we should be made to feel that the author has bent all his energies to producing in us one kind of feeling. This does not mean that he may not use a certain variety in the means of producing that effect. Depicting a peaceful scene in order that we may be thrilled upon seeing it shattered by the impact of the "tragic mischief" is good art, as one realizes in Kipling's "Without Benefit of Clergy." Even a sad story may have laughter in it, but from the beginning we must be made to feel the dominant motive of the coming climax and dénouement. If the story is to be farcical, the author must give us warning by striking the note of farce early in the story. We like the element of surprise in fiction, but it must be, so to speak, an expected surprise.

A good short story always is simple in construction. Though it has a plot, its action is dominated by one incident. Watch the make-up of the next few stories you read, and note how frequently the plot is made by stringing together two or three

characteristic incidents, with one larger incident that furnishes the climax. Note, too, how all these episodes, large and little, have a certain similarity, — a tendency to point in the same direction, — due to the fact that they all illustrate the character of the chief person in the story. A good short story always has few persons, and the one that stands in the high light usually is, in the language of the street, "the whole thing." In this chief character, moreover, only one or two particular traits or phases of human nature are brought out by all the various episodes, thus furnishing one element of unity. In the hands of a skillful artist the action of the story will further heighten this unity by moving unfalteringly toward a definite dramatic end.

See, for instance, how the various episodes in François Coppée's "The Substitute" all illustrate two cognate sides of the hero's character and all lead straight to the pathetic catastrophe. The hero is arrested for vagabondage when he is ten years old. Here already you have the keynote of his tragedy. At seventeen he is released from a reform school only to fall into evil companionship, and get a bad name with the police. Five awful

years in prison at Toulon carry the story to a turning-point in the hero's life. He reforms and goes into honest business with a friend. Then come the main incident and the climax, with a sudden turn to another element in his character, for which the author has all along been subtly preparing us by arousing our sympathy for the man in spite of his badness. His friend commits a theft, and the hero, to save him from a fate like his own, takes the friend's guilt upon his own shoulders and ends up as a life-prisoner at Cayenne, registered as "incorrigible."

After you are through reading the story, you can look back and see how every incident and descriptive touch has not only been characteristic of the hero but has led quite logically to the somewhat unexpected dénouement. And the whole has left a single and distinct impression on your mind and heart. When such an impression is as eternally true as it is emotionally deep, the story is a great story.

James Lane Allen's explanation of why his "Bride of the Mistletoe" is not a novel may serve as a good summary of what is meant by unity in a short story. He says: "There are two characters

— a middle-aged married couple living in a plain farmhouse; one point on the field of human nature is located; at that point one subject is treated; in the treatment one movement is directed toward one climax; no external event whatever is introduced, and the time is about forty hours." He might have added that the tone throughout is one of poetic sentiment tinged with gentle pathos.

Harmony of tone — uniformity of temper, mood, or spirit — is one of the most important elements of unity in a short story. Whether the tone be gay or grave, satirical or sympathetic, sentimental or cynical, it should be maintained throughout. The tone depends upon the theme and purpose. When Charles Reade sat down to write his gay little story of "The Box Tunnel," he took for his theme the results of a certain stolen kiss in the dark, and for his purpose the production of smiles by means of the traits of masculine and feminine human nature revealed in the outworking of the neat little plot. Consequently we find a tone of quizzical humor pervading every paragraph, even those in which he merely describes the characters.

With similar skill and unity of spirit Poe

handles all the materials of "The Fall of the House of Usher" in a single mood — that of terror; every word, every sentence, every image and event in the story helps to deepen the sense of impending ruin and to weave a sort of hypnotic spell of fear about the reader as well as about the characters. On the other hand, "The Gold Bug," being merely an intellectual problem story, is written in a tone of cold curiosity. "The Maelstrom," typical of another class of Poe's tales, strikes the keynote of realistic adventure and gains its effect by showing how danger develops abnormal alertness of mind. Again, Poe's "The Masque of Red Death," appealing to a morbid taste for details of repulsive incidents, fairly swims in an atmosphere of the horrible.

In every case the short story should produce its effect by means of the fewest possible words consistent with the utmost emphasis. The novelist may indulge in digressions, didactics, superfluous episodes, and still not do irreparable injury to his work; not so with the short-story writer. With him every touch must count. Read Maupassant's "The Necklace" and note how every sentence helps to charge the final paragraph with emotional

meaning. To make a short story that will live, the author must handle his tools as carefully as if he were carving a cameo or making a sonnet. He really is bound by almost the same laws as the playwright, and his work must be judged, therefore, rather by the standards of the drama than by those of the novel or romance.

In the putting together of the materials, these are the main things required in a short story,— compression, proportion, judicious selection. And the queen bee of the hive is compression. The more thoughts, fancies, and emotions the author can pack into his limited number of words, the further his story is likely to go. We wish him to convey his minor ideas by suggestion, if possible, not putting them into words. Many a good story is spoiled by explaining too much, leaving the reader's wits and imagination nothing to do. The reading of light fiction is a game, in which the reader wishes to play his part, otherwise it is no fun.

And if the interest be mainly that of curiosity and surprise, as it usually is, then the unpardonable sin is to let the secret out before the end. When you find your interest in a story flagging, it

is usually because the author has clumsily allowed you to guess the ending, thus killing curiosity, or has told you too many things that you could have guessed anyhow, thus becoming prosy. In both cases he has ceased to stimulate the imagination and keep the mind alert.

The enjoyment of reading a story lies largely in the little leaps that the mind makes from one point to the next. When one electric wire is brought within a certain distance of another, the current leaps in a flash across the little chasm, creating an illuminating spark in transit. In the same way the success of a jest lies in telling just enough and leaving the hearer's wit to leap the intervening gap to the conclusion, thus producing in him the titillating thrill that provokes laughter. Likewise a large part of the success of a story lies in leaving out the non-essentials in such a way that the reader's mind is made to vault numberless little gaps with the aid of the right words at the right places. The style must be suggestive, not exhaustive, hinting a whole history in a sentence, packing the heart of an emotion into a phrase.

In such matters of technique Maupassant has

never been surpassed. His stories nearly all lack the moral sense, but almost any of them, such as "The Vendetta," "A Piece of String," "The Horla," "A Coward," "Tallow Ball," and "The Confession," will illustrate what the structure and style (not the spirit) of a short story should be.

The language of the short story is bound to be more terse, more elliptical, more artificial, than that of longer fiction. The triumph of the story-teller's art is to produce the illusion of life in spite of these limitations. The cultured reader is becoming more and more strict in demanding that the author's vivid effects shall not be sought through melodramatic action, stilted dialogue, or exaggerated, ultra-poetical forms of speech. Poe's characters, and even Hawthorne's, often talk with a pedantic bookishness that strikes the twentieth-century ear as unnatural. But the prevailing fault of sentimental writers, such as Amélie Rives or Marie Corelli, is to lay on their descriptive coloring with a brush made of a comet's tail. Octave Thanet, herself one of the most skillful of American story-writers, hits off this defect with humor and discernment.

Short story writers [she says] are tempted to place an inordinate value on words, on single phrases that light a situation with a flare. They sacrifice form, harmony, the delicate graces of expression, the charm and rest of half-tints, to a passionate and wearisome splendor. Each sentence is so brilliant, there is no climax. A style of this kind makes the eyes ache. Strange and far-fetched similes are part of such a style, and poor Nature has more personifications than she was given by Greek mythology. The wind cannot even blow in straightforward, unadorned English: it will "tremble" or "rave," or, at best, be "atilt through the lush grasses"; nor does it mend matters by ceasing to blow; in that case it is liable to be "aswoon."

Short stories may be romantic, realistic, psychological, or anything else that a novel can be, but in every case the supreme tests of excellence are the vitality of the characters, the sense of life, the freshness and depth of the central idea, the unity of tone and plot, and the holding power of the intellectual or emotional interest.

Does the author make you feel that the story-people are alive, human, interesting, as Kipling does, even with the middle-distance characters, in "The Man Who Was"? Does he make you care what happens to them, as Bret Harte does in

"The Outcasts of Poker Flat"? If so, he has fulfilled the first requisite of a short story. This human interest is the big interest of fiction. Poe's lack of it places him far below the rank which his artistry would otherwise entitle him to. Human interest in its most intense form, that of love, touches the deepest chords of our nature and affects us powerfully for good or evil, according as the ethic of the story is noble or base. Kipling's "Without Benefit of Clergy" is a fine example of how even illicit love may be handled in a way to arouse only the finer emotions. Note how the story, by sheer human interest, compels you, perhaps against your will, to feel sympathy for that English soldier and the native woman of India who clings to him as a wife, yet is no wife. Who can resist the simple pathos of the scene that shows her asleep, with her arm tenderly crooked to clasp the baby that is forever gone? It is all done by a plain recital of events and of dialogue — no moralizings, no agonizings, no sentimental hysterics. And yet the tears are there, and will lie in wait to surprise your eyelashes though you read the story again and again. Such is true literature, the kind that lasts.

There are stories that trick one into a fleeting emotion over some situation that is not quite genuine, but one feels the falsity afterward and has no desire to read the work again. The real thing is produced by truth of insight and sincerity of feeling, and these are the chief secrets of good character-drawing. Kipling, whatever the current critical cant about him, is the greatest living English master of the art of creating natural short-story characters. Even in a romantic story, such as "The Man Who Would Be King," in which the emphasis is laid largely upon the setting, the two adventurers talk and act just as such men would. The hero of "Wee Willie Winkie" not only acts like a child but thinks like a child. It is this psychological insight, coupled with a big imagination and a rare power of coining original phrases packed with meaning, that makes Kipling's stories live.

If an author has nothing to say, no perfection in saying it will be of any avail. On the other hand, the most momentous message cannot be conveyed effectively in art without beauty of form. The great and lasting story, which we are trying to know at sight, must not only be built

with all its parts trending toward a climax, like Robert Louis Stevenson's weird story of "Markheim"; it must not only have a corresponding unity of tone, like Hawthorne's didactic story of "The Great Stone Face," but must also present a central situation of eternal human interest, like Dickens's sentimental "Christmas Carol."

The vital fault of the great mass of mediocre stories is not in the art of the plot; it is rather in the feebleness of the idea. The theme has not been preëminently worth putting into a story. No amount of complication, no heaping of incident on incident, no decorations of style, can give force or vitality to a banal situation. Well-drawn characters always have some interest, and a simple, plausible, well-managed plot always will help to focus that interest; but all the art in the world cannot save the reader from disappointment if the narrative be pointless. The meaning of the story, too, should have something new about it; should deal with a new combination of circumstances, light up a new recess in the mysterious chambers of the heart, embody a fresh idea, or provoke a new thrill of some kind.

The interest of a story may be either intellect-

ual or emotional, or, preferably, both together. The idea may be ugly yet powerful, as in Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado"; or it may be sweet and beautiful, as in James Lane Allen's idyl of "A Kentucky Cardinal." The plot may aim at surprise, as in Aldrich's "Marjorie Daw"; or at mystification, as in Stockton's "The Lady or the Tiger?" or at tragic emotion, as in Balzac's "La Grande Brétèche"; or at contrast, as in Bret Harte's "Outcasts of Poker Flat"; or at symbolism, as in Kipling's "They"; but always there must be something original, something worth while, something that touches us where we live.

Need I add that this spark of genius, which marks the great story, is at its best if it be kindled by a moral as well as an artistic sense — if it throw a hopeful and not a sinister light on the human world? Poe, with all his originality, lacked something spiritual that Hawthorne possessed, and that often makes even the lesser American story-writers preferable to those of greater talents, who have written without an informing sense of moral beauty as well as of literary values.

LIBRARY

XII

PROSE OTHER THAN FICTION

The domain of pure literary art, sometimes vaguely termed *belles-lettres*, includes only those works in which imagination and taste predominate. The moment we leave the realm of fiction, poetry, and imaginative essays, we come more or less under the sway of science, and the laws of the two realms are utterly different, even antagonistic. Art aims at the emotions, sacrificing material fact, when necessary, to express the larger truth touching the soul; science addresses the mind, sacrificing all else to get at exact intellectual truth. Science permits no liberties with fact for the sake of literary finish; art permits no dragging in of facts at the expense of the beautiful. Each must be judged by its own laws.

There is a large border-region, however, in which art and science, with more or less bickering, hold sway together; and the scientific spirit — in the form of realism — is in our day profoundly modifying pure literature itself. In this borderland

belong most works of biography and history; certain books of travel, — notably when written by literary artists such as Stevenson, Arthur Symons, and Pierre Loti; essays of every didactic and critical sort, including literary criticism itself; even semi-scientific treatises, such as John C. Van Dyke's "The Desert," and Percival Lowell's "Mars and its Canals," in which the authors have conveyed scientific truth with more or less use of imagination and literary feeling. The value of such writings must be judged by both standards, — that of literary beauty and that of scientific truth.

As biography is of the widest popular interest next to fiction, let us consider it first. In so far as a biography is a recital of the facts in a man's life, the reader has a right to insist on exactness of statement. There is no poetic or romantic license here, allowing the author to say that the soul of a good man winged its way to heaven amid the chiming of bells on Christmas morning, when the man really died on the 23d of December. No matter how much a slight divergence from fact might enhance the dramatic interest, the biographer must not indulge in it. Froude heightened the

interest of his life of Carlyle by making it appear that Carlyle martyrized his wife; but in so far as this theory is untrue Froude deserves the censure with which critics have assailed him.

But a biography, to be worthy the name, should be something more than a mere chronicle of the dates and acts of a man's life. These are only the skeleton, and not inspiring or even interesting to look at. The author must add the flesh and blood, using memory, imagination, feeling, grace of style, all the tools of the literary artist, filling in a thousand details of mingled fact and fancy to lend color and movement to the picture, until at last we see the man "in his habit as he lived," even as we see Dr. Johnson in the unequaled "Life" by Boswell. Then it becomes literature, delighting the æsthetic sense by its style, its imagination, its unity of spirit.

This amounts to saying that the whole life-story should be seen through the personality and philosophy of the biographer, as Gladstone is seen through John Morley's very different yet fair and pellucid spirit in his life of that statesman. The facts are of the subject's making, not to be tampered with; the comments are the author's own,

holding the facts in a consistent point of view, which should be frankly and steadfastly maintained throughout the book. On this, the literary side of the biography, there are no standards that can be applied with scientific strictness. So long as the author neither distorts nor suppresses any essential facts, he is free to play the artist to the best of his ability; and in judging his work we are again under the vague, pleasing sway of taste, whose verdicts change with every mood and temperament, but whose fundamental laws remain essentially unaltered through the changing years.

"How delicate decent is English biography, bless its mealy mouth!" exclaims Carlyle, who adds that a well-written life is almost as rare as a well-spent one. It is true that the biographer as a rule errs through too great sympathy with his subject, laying his idol's faults on others' shoulders or passing them over in silence. Thus Weems's "Life of Washington" idealizes its subject, making him so faultless that he loses human interest. Yet even undue praise is preferable to the other extreme of coldness or hostility on the part of the biographer, which robs the portrait of magnetism. A good biographer, like a good critic, approaches

his subject with a warm sympathy tempered by a steadfast will to be just and lie not. Joseph Jefferson used to say that an actor should take upon the stage with him a warm heart and a cool head. The biographer should pray for the same equipment.

The autobiographer needs a somewhat different set of faculties. From him we neither expect nor desire much self-criticism, being content if he refrains from inordinate egotism. And even if he forgets to refrain, it is no great matter; as Mark Twain says, an autobiography is always a give-away. The man who writes his own life cannot hide his own character. If, as Mrs. Poyser said of Mr. Craig, "he 's welly like a cock as thinks the sun's rose o' purpose to hear him crow," we shall know the fact from the tone of his voice. Besides, this is just what we want — as much of his personality as possible, undisguised.

The greatest service that we ask of an autobiography is that it shall reveal the writer's inner life, especially the religious, emotional, and intellectual experiences that have been the dominating realities behind the shadowy outward events of his career. A sincere self-revelation of this kind,

no matter how obscure the individual, scarcely can be other than interesting and valuable; for, though the human heart is a common possession, we really know little more about it than about the heart of Africa, which is popularly supposed to be a warm mixture of lions and sand. It is always interesting to look into one of these mysterious centres of human nature, and to watch the reaction of its traits and impulses upon the outer world. When such a self-revelation comes from a trained scientific observer, such as Franklin, Darwin, Huxley, or Spencer; or from a skilled translator of emotions into phrases, such as Leigh Hunt, Mme. de Staël, or Vittorio Alfieri, we are pretty sure to have a book of rare interest.

Biography in general may be tested, on the side of facts, by such questions as these: Is the author accurate? Is he fair? Is he perchance more in love with his own pet theories than with the truth, obtruding himself obnoxiously between the reader and the subject? On the literary side: Does the narrative possess movement, life, vivacity, piquancy of detail, spice of anecdote, charm of style, symmetry of construction? On the whole, does the book contain enough matter of general inter-

est to make it worth reading, and does it conform to the laws of literary art?

A history may be written in any one of four methods — narrative, descriptive, critical, or philosophical — according to the element that predominates in it. Francis Parkman's various volumes on the history of New France, which are unsurpassed in accuracy and interest of detail, are chiefly narrative in form. Carlyle's "French Revolution," which is a series of vast word-pictures rather than a systematic recital of events, is descriptive history. On the other hand, Goldwin Smith's "The United Kingdom" and James Ford Rhodes's "History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850" are largely critical, allotting praise or blame, assessing moral or social values, at every step. Finally, a book such as Guizot's "History of Civilization," being concerned with the underlying chain of cause and effect, is essentially philosophical. The ideal history or biography usually combines several or all of these methods, as do the very readable historical works of John Fiske.

History has been defined as the sum of the biographies of a few strong men. This is fairly true of

the older forms of political history, which are mainly narratives of war; but it is not true of the more modern and interesting works that tell the story of the whole people, the nation's customs, beliefs, modes of thought, institutions, etc., as does Green's "Short History of the English People," or John Bach McMaster's fascinating "History of the People of the United States."

Truth is the first essential of any form of history. The second essential is charm of interest. Both are indispensable for the creation of a work of the first rank.

These two standards, the one scientific, the other artistic, really include all the other tests, such as these: Does the author show any originality, offer any new material, make a book more complete or attractive than others that have preceded it? What political, religious, or other bias does he show on debatable questions? Does his work show due proportion of parts, so as to make a fully rounded history of the kind he has undertaken to write? Ignorance of facts and prejudice in handling them are the two cardinal sins of the historian or the biographer. To detect these faults, the reader himself needs a considerable

knowledge of the subject, though he may sometimes find them by the book's self-contradictions or by other internal evidence. On the structural side a history should have unity, balance, grace of style, proportion, a central design as clearly conceived as a novelist's plot, some of the dignity and beauty that make Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" the greatest history in our language.

While truth is the highest quality of history, the cold, mathematical fact in itself is dead without a living garment of grace to attract the reader. Thus it happens that a slight bias, due to the author's individuality, may be part of the charm that makes a history live. Not the least of Andrew Lang's merits as a historical writer, for instance, is found in certain idiosyncrasies such as his partiality for the Stuarts. One soon learns to make the necessary allowance for this personal equation, while yet enjoying the piquancy of the style of which it is a part. Marion Crawford, indeed, cries out in his "Salve Venetia" that there is no such thing as impartial history — that it is only the second-rate historian or the compiler of dry-as-dust school texts who does

not take one side or the other in the struggles he describes.

A humorous putting of the same fact is found in Anatole France's delightful story, "The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard," where Coccoz, the book-salesman, in urging Bonnard to buy a copy of the "History of the Tour de Nesle," says: —

"It 's a historical work — a real story!"

"In that case," replies Bonnard, "it would be very wearisome to read, for historical works that do not lie are exceedingly dull."

The truth underlying the jest is that it is not enough that a history should merely convey information: it should convey it interestingly, with a touch of imagination and of art, whatever the so-called "scientific historians" may say. We, being ordinary readers and not specialists or Gradgrinds, would rather have the author lean frankly in the direction of his own tastes and principles, if this infusion of his personality alone can impart life to an otherwise bald and mummified narrative. So long as he attends to telling essential truth, we will attend to judging his judgments by his facts and his spirit.

Another good way to test a historical work is to

compare it with others of the same class and see where it is likely to stand in relation to the main body of standard history. This is comparative criticism, an admirable method when applied with wisdom, but one that requires previous acquaintance with the whole field. In history, as in other literature, the only way to acquire the ideals needed for the proper measurement of new books is through familiarity with classics that have stood the test of time.

Now for a more imaginative form of prose — the form most nearly allied to poetry in the latitude it allows to the author's airiest fancy and finest shades of emotion. I mean the essay. Here we have a wide variety, ranging from Bacon's concentrated wisdom, or Montaigne's shrewd observations of human nature, to the gentle humor of Lamb or the Hibernian whimsicalities of "Mr. Dooley."

I think it is Hilaire Belloc who has remarked that in order to write an essay one begins brilliantly at the beginning, ends impressively at the end, and fills the middle with any rubble that comes handy. Evidently the essay in which this appeared was not written in a spirit of biblical

solemnity. An essayist resembles a story-writer in aiming to produce a certain effect on the reader, and his work must be judged in the light of what he has tried to do. Has he sought to instruct, to convince, or merely to amuse? Is he serious, satirical, humorous, whimsical? DeFoe's famous pamphlet, "The Shortest Way with Dissenters" [namely, to hang them], was regarded by the High Church authorities as a sound essay, though perhaps a trifle severe, until they discovered that it was really a biting satire, making fun of them. The spirit made all the difference. The consequence was that the author, who was later to give the world "Robinson Crusoe," found himself criticized after the manner of his time. He was put in the pillory, fined, and imprisoned; and when he came out of prison at the end of a year, he found his family starving and his prospects ruined. In order to be equally just and convincing in our criticisms of Gilbert K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, Bliss Perry, George E. Woodberry, Agnes Repplier, W. C. Brownell, Hamilton W. Mabie, Edward S. Martin, and other essayists of our own day, we must at least know what each is trying to do to us. Lamb's great historical essay on the dis-

covery of roast pig should not be thrown into the same balances with an airy trifle such as Emerson on the Oversoul.

There are a hundred questions by which one might test an essay. Is it spacious or small, elegant or crude, genial or churlish? Is it luminous yet lacking in experience, or is it dull though learned? Is there movement of thought, logical progression, or does the writer repeat himself and travel in a petty circle? Does the essay grow in seriousness and weight as it advances toward the conclusion, as a serious essay should? Does the style show originality, imagination, fancy, culture, force? Is the book literature or merely bound pages? Charm, in some form, the literary essay must have if it is to be worth reading.

The didactic essay, the editorial article, and the expository treatise should stick closely to their subjects. Their appeal is almost wholly to the intellect, and, save for the logical arrangement of their ideas, they make little use of art; and they are correspondingly ephemeral. The light essay, intended chiefly for diversion or inspiration, permits a large liberty of digression, provided only that the author amuse us on the way and bring us

back to his original theme at the end, leaving the keynote of his fantasia lingering on the air. A rich fancy, a flexible style, and a cheery spirit — these are the endowment of the born essayist. Did n't Stevenson have them? Does n't Henry James possess them? When you find an essayist constantly decorating his discourse with metaphor, simile, and trope, each a fresh and pleasing conceit of its kind, as Richard Le Gallienne does, you may know that he at least possesses this precious gift of poetic fancy. If, in addition, you find him rich in stimulating or smile-provoking turns of thought, after the manner of Chesterton and Shaw, you may know that he likewise has wit. But if he touches your heart with his laughter, as Thackeray and the gentle Elia did, so that you remember him and his work with a warmth outlasting all mere admiration for wit, by that token he has the more precious gifts of humor and lovable personality.

What has been said of biography, history, and essays applies so closely to memoirs, travels, and other prose works, that it is needless to follow the subject much further. Travels are like essays in depending for their charm largely upon the per-

sonality of the author. They require feeling and imagination to make literature of them, as in the case of the "Familiar Letters" of James Howell, which are still read after two centuries. Some travelers transport you to the country described, others come back and tell you about it; but this is merely saying that some have imagination and others have not. Some books of travel, like those of Edward Hutton and Arthur Symons, are states of soul; that is, they are largely subjective. When Mr. Howells writes of Venice, he makes you see the lagoons and St. Mark's objectively, vividly. When Mr. Symons writes of Florence or Pisa, he is more likely to tell you what he feels in the presence of those cities than to describe the Duomo or the Leaning Tower so that you can see them. Both methods have their uses: but in the one case we get pictures, imagination; in the other, personality, the reaction of things upon temperament. If the temperament be attractive, the book is pleasing; but in travels, as in any other literary work, the supreme quality — after that of human interest — is the power of flashing memorable pictures into the reader's imagination by the necromancy of the right words.

Nearly all prose other than fiction, then, must be judged by a dual standard, testing it on the one hand for the accuracy, interest, and value of its facts; on the other for the charm and beauty of the style and imagery in which literary art clothes pragmatic truth.

XIII

POETRY AND THE DRAMA

One might collect a hundred different definitions of poetry, but the idea of beauty would be in all of them. Beauty, alike of thought, of feeling, and of expression, is the essence of poetry. In its highest forms poetry is the metrical expression of an exaltation of soul that suffuses the realities of nature and life with a glory transcending the real, —

> The light that never was on sea or land,
> The consecration and the poet's dream.

Poetry is the most spiritual, and in that sense the highest, form of literary art. The poet's mission is not so much to convey definite truth as to make us dream noble dreams that will inspire us to love and do the things of truth; not so much to instruct the mind as to make us feel, and feel exaltedly. Verse that does not touch the emotions is merely metrical prose. Like religion, poetry speaks to the heart rather than to the head, and science, which speaks to the brain only, never can

supplant either poetry or religion. In these scientific and money-getting days Fiction has crowded her older and more lovely sister to the wall, but Poetry is neither dead nor dying. The poetic spirit illumines the best of our fiction and essays, awaiting only a change of fashion to appear again in metrical form. Even now there are indications of a revival of the poetic drama. Cheer up! There will be poets of the future, and they will not be Walt Whitmans, either.

To distinguish good poetry from bad it is not sufficient that one should know iambic, trochaic, dactylic, or anapæstic verse at sight, or be familiar with the laws of rhyme and rhythm, or be able to use the proper shop-talk in describing the various kinds of lines and stanzas. These things are merely the husks of criticism. A simple country boy who does not know an amphibrach from a cæsura, yet who can feel the subtle spell of Keats's art, and who, in his enthusiasm, can make others see out through the

> Magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn

may be a better critical guide than a learned professor who can give a Greek name to every pair of

syllables, yet who lacks the emotional warmth to make us feel the beauty of the poem he is dissecting. As Milton said, poetry is "simple, sensuous, passionate," and the reader should approach it simply and with open heart, letting it touch his emotions, not falling afoul of it with yardstick and calipers.

The first test of true poetry is that it shall stir the imagination or the feelings — or both; that it shall exalt us with its sensuous beauty — its melody, rhythm, color, and grace of imagery. Concrete images, appealing to the senses, are better for poetic purposes than abstract ideas. It is chiefly amid forms of physical loveliness, or of beloved sights, sounds, and perfumes, that the soul seeks the realization of its dreams of beauty. An imagination rich in sensuous imagery is one of the hall-marks of poetic power. Note what a remarkable number of pictures, each or all of which might be put upon canvas by a painter, have been crowded by Keats into these eight lines: —

> And, sitting muffled in dark leaves, you hear
> The windy clanging of the minster clock;
> Although between it and the garden lies
> A league of grass, washed by a slow broad stream,

That, stirred with languid pulses of the oar,
Waves all its lazy lilies and creeps on,
Barge-laden, to three arches of a bridge
Crowned with the minster-towers.

Or see how Congreve adds feeling to the picture that stands out in six lines of "The Mourning Bride," declared by Dr. Johnson (somewhat extravagantly) to be the finest poetical passage he had ever read: —

How reverend is the face of this tall pile,
Whose ancient pillars rear their marble heads
To bear aloft its arched and ponderous roof,
By its own weight made steadfast and immovable,
Looking tranquillity! It strikes an awe
And terror to my aching sight.

The reader must have some poetry in his own soul before he can tell good verse from bad, before he can respond to the mystical touch of the beautiful. And to enjoy the highest poetry there must be not only imagination, not only feeling, but also the moral quality that can perceive spiritual beauty, the soul of the poet's message. This message should not protrude in didactic form, though Bryant made some genuine poetry even on that plan; but it should rather be the inward essence of the whole creation, shedding a perfume as of violets on the air. The poet's heart must be capable,

not only of intense feeling, but of noble feeling, and only the same kind of heart can respond to his message and feel the fine intoxication of this most ethereal of all perfumes — spirituality.

Let us not, however, get too far into the clouds to enjoy what the humbler poets have to offer us. We have a homely but true test of such verse in Joaquin Miller's blunt dictum: "The only excuse for any book is the pleasure it can give and the good it can do." As Elia W. Peattie has said, it is well to keep in an expectant mind in regard to new poets: "The artificial and trivial may often be charming; the simplest song may be sincere; the haphazard ballad may be gallant; the self-conscious lyric or sonnet may show good workmanship; and perchance, some day, by a glorious fortune, the reader may come across a man with a great and comforting message, or a superb revolutionist, with utterance so clear, comprehension so fundamental, and an appeal so universal that one may without hesitancy cry, 'Here is a poet!' "

The most frequent defect in the common run of present-day verse is mediocrity of content. The versification usually is passably correct and

the spirit commendable, but the thought, imagination, and feeling are too often commonplace. The work lacks distinction of imagery, fails to touch the emotions. As Herbert Spencer says, it "does not bubble up as a spring, but is simply pumped up, and pumped up poetry is not worth reading."

Of the four classes of poetry, — lyric, didactic, epic, and dramatic, — probably four fifths of the current product is lyric in form. Didactic and epic poetry are now so seldom written and so little read that we need not say much about them here. Lyric poetry, which should express a single emotion in verse that can be sung, calls for delicacy of thought, intensity of feeling, and a highly finished form of expression. Are any of the lines harsh to the ear? Are any of the thoughts commonplace, prosaic, or puerile? Are any of the similes or metaphors far-fetched or incongruous? Is the diction pure, the meaning clear, the structure symmetrical, the style simple, the spirit sincere? In so far as lyric verse fails to stand the test of these questions it falls short of being good poetry and tends to become doggerel. By the way, is there anything wrong with the following

stanzas, and if so, what? I found them in a twentieth-century book: —

Bread and butter, 't is on thee
That I live continually;
It 's thro' thee — I swear thro' thee —
Life brings all good things to me!

Let me move my chair up close,
Let me have a piece of toast;
Pass the butter for a spread,
Oh, there 's nothing beats the bread!

But before you conclude that the twentieth century cannot produce poetry, read, I pray you, Alfred Noyes's "The Forest of Wild Thyme," including the song to the three children at the gate of the Faery City of Sleep, and especially the splendid mother-song, sounding "faint as the smile of Pity," that greets them as they enter — a noble example of what lyric poetry ought to be: —

Dreams; dreams; ah, the memory binding us,
Blinding our eyes to the way that we go;
Till the new sorrow come, once more reminding us
Blindly of kind hearts, ours long ago:
Mother-mine, whisper we, yours was the love for me!
Still, though our paths lie lone and apart,
Yours is the true love, shining above for me,
Yours are the kind eyes, hurting my heart.

Dreams; dreams; ah, how shall we sing of them,
Dreams that we love with our head on her breast;
Dreams; dreams; and the cradle-sweet swing of them;
Ay, for her voice was the sound we loved best.

Can we remember at all, or, forgetting it,
Can we recall for a moment the gleam
Of our childhood's delight and the wonder begetting it,
Wonder awakened in dreams of a dream?

Scarcely less important than the feeling, thought, and imagery of the poet is the perfection of his verse-form. Is the metre simple, sonorous, technically correct, well balanced, fully suited to the subject? Are the words the inevitable best words, as in Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard"? Is the language strained and artificial, or seemingly spontaneous and natural? Joaquin Miller thinks that when the Messiah of American literature comes he will come singing, so far as may be, in words of one syllable. Certainly simplicity is of the essence of lyric art. For a model of the art that conceals art, in this respect, I know of nothing to surpass that exquisite stanza by Holmes: —

For the mossy marbles rest
On the lips that he has pressed
In their bloom;
And the names he loved to hear
Have been carved for many a year
On the tomb.

And do you remember that haunting fragment by Landor, which Charles Lamb was never weary of repeating?

Ah! what avails the sceptred race,
And what the form divine?
What every virtue, every grace —
Rose Aylmer, all were thine:
Rose Aylmer, whom these wakeful eyes
May weep but never see,
A night of memories and of sighs
I consecrate to thee.

The authors of both of these gems may have labored long to perfect them, yet the words seem to flow as easily as a brook from an inexhaustible mountain tarn; and in their limpid depths we see their meaning without an effort. Yes, simplicity, naturalness, and clearness are elements of poetic greatness. Browning could be ranked still more highly than he is, if he had not so often put his noble thoughts into obscure form; though we must grant that Browning's message always is worth the labor of extracting it. It is true that a poem may be pleasing through mere mystical melody. Much of Swinburne's verse creates a mood in the reader, as music does, without offering any ideas worth entertaining. Such poetry, however, has only one half of the double endowment of form and content that makes great literature, and must be ranked below that which evokes beautiful ideas and images.

The best way to learn to judge new poetry is to steep your soul in the rich wine of the old masterpieces. Instead of unfitting you to appreciate the modest achievements of minor poets, it will attune your ear more finely to the humblest poetic merit that is genuine.

Turn we now for a brief view, necessarily inadequate, of the literary drama. Not a few dramas now are written only to be read, but the majority, like those of the modern leaders, Ibsen and Sudermann, are interesting alike in print and on the stage. Whether a drama be prose or verse, tragedy or comedy, or set to music and played as grand opera or light opera, it must conform to much more rigid limitations than those of fiction or lyric poetry. The poetic drama, indeed, is the most difficult of all forms of composition, for it must obey the laws of four different literary forms at one and the same time. It should have the natural character delineation of the novel, the unity and directness of a short story, the musical diction of poetry, and the practical actability of a stage-play.

The complex task of the dramatist is thus analyzed by Henry Arthur Jones, next to Mr.

Pinero the most successful of contemporaneous English playwrights: —

> First, a play may be regarded as a piece of literature. This is the art of the poet or man of letters. Second, as a representation of human life. This is the art of the dramatist. Third, as a series of situations. This is the art of the theatrical playwright. . . . The art of dramatic construction consists in so condensing, so selecting from all these materials as to give you what the playwright considers the essence of the character, the essence of the action. And this has to be packed lightly into three or four acts of about half an hour each.

There are many tests to apply to the drama, but the first and most vital is this: Does it stir our curiosity, keeping us interested from first to last in "the thing that is going to happen"? To this intellectual interest should be added the still more powerful emotional interest that is aroused by making us care what happens to the characters for their own sake. And then this human interest is further heightened by allowing us, the spectators, to know certain things that the characters themselves do not know concerning their own approaching fate. We see a blow impending over the hero or the villain that he

is not aware of, and as we watch it descending we feel the "dramatic thrill," and are intensely interested in seeing what this particular bundle of human nature will do when he perceives the danger. This superior, though incomplete, knowledge on the part of the reader or spectator, constitutes the main difference between dramatic and narrative interest. Hamlet does not know that Polonius is behind the arras, but we know it, and are all alive to see what he will do when he finds it out; and when Hamlet stabs through the screen and kills the old man we feel that the dramatic thrill has reached an adequate climax.

The sovereign law of the stage, its essential demand, is action. "With the rise of the curtain," as Maeterlinck has said, "the high intellectual desire within us undergoes transformation; and in place of the thinker there stands the mere instinctive spectator, the man whose one desire is to see something happen. There are no words so profound, so noble and admirable, but they will soon weary us if they leave the situation unchanged."

The perfect drama admits of no digressions. Thus the primary test — regarding its continu-

ous power to inspire sympathetic curiosity — resolves itself into sundry questions concerning the unity of the action. Does every incident help onward the dramatic movement? Does each scene advance the story? Is there any episode or passage that fails to keep you eager to know what is coming next? Even a fine poetic passage, such as those which sometimes halt the movement of Stephen Phillips's earlier plays, is a dramatic defect, though it may justify itself on purely poetic grounds. For unity of action and skillful economy of materials, there are no models that can surpass Ibsen's best plays. Read, for instance, "A Doll's House" or "An Enemy of the People" and see how perfect is its unity.

It is not necessary here to repeat the outline of a dramatic plot, with its rise, climax, and fall, which, in the chapter on the plot of a novel, I have already compared to the parabola described by a sky-rocket. If you will turn back and read that again, you will see the main points to be noted in judging the normal stage-plot. Watch especially the climax and dénouement, for upon these most of all depends the success or failure of a drama. The great majority of new plays break down at

the climax, becoming, on the one hand, tame and inadequate, or, on the other, melodramatic and unnatural. The events at this critical juncture must be dramatically exciting, yet they must also be logical, natural, the inevitable outcome of forces and personalities that have been in evidence from the beginning. The catastrophe never should be precipitated by an outside agency that suddenly intervenes at the last moment. If the end be peaceful, it should leave a sense of cheerfulness and satisfaction, as does the "Ulysses" of Stephen Phillips. If it be tragic, it should leave us convinced, as does "Hamlet," that it could not have been otherwise under the circumstances.

There is a strain of the unsophisticated savage in most of us that makes us like the thrill of good red melodrama once in a while, but the crudity of this kind of art is seen in the fact that it cannot long hold us. Instead of aiming at a true representation of character, conforming to the laws of human nature and probability, as legitimate drama does, it seeks to stir the feelings of the audience to the highest pitch of unreasoning emotion by means of all sorts of shocks and sensational surprises, however improbable or in-

congruous. One soon wearies of the impossible situations and forced intensity of melodrama. Its heroes and villains, not being wholly human, presently stir us to ridicule. The interest of true drama, however, is as undying as the human interest of life itself.

Next to the interest of curiosity and of unity comes the interest of the characters as fellow men. The people in a play should conform to much the same tests as those in a novel. The more real and natural they seem, other things being equal, the higher the dramatist's achievement. Do the characters act and speak naturally? This insistent and vital question keeps asking itself at every moment from the rise of the curtain to its final fall. In the realistic drama, such as Ibsen's, it represents the hardest problem with which actors have to cope in hundreds of weary rehearsals.

As for the morality of a play, it may safely be judged by the same standards that we have applied to the novel. There is no more reason why coarse lines and corrupting situations should be permitted in a play than in a story, though as a matter of fact one finds them there much more

often, owing to the lower average of taste and mentality in the general run of theatre audiences. To say that one should have definite standards in this regard is not to say that one should judge an Ibsen or Sudermann play by the rules of a girls' boarding-school. A play such as "Magda" is not immoral, though it deals with a woman's sin and its consequences.

Standards of decency change somewhat from generation to generation, and we are living in a period of such change, the tendency being to give dramatists a larger latitude in the phases of life permissible to be treated. But the fundamental principles remain unchanged. The vital test applies less to the materials than to the way they are handled. In the hands of an impure writer even the subject of purity may be made hateful. It all depends on the spirit. Ibsen, though he deals with many subjects that a past generation would have been scandalized to see on the stage, is essentially a sound moralist. His spirit is that of an earnest teacher, though needlessly morbid. In so far as Bernard Shaw, beneath the cap and bells of his ingrained sensationalism, is a sincere socialistic reformer, his intellectual anarchism

may be justified on the same lines — by socialists.

The whole question is one of ultimate public good. You may safely judge a drama, on or off the stage, by the nature of the final impression it leaves. Has it made injustice seem less odious, aroused unwholesome sympathy for vice, made a peep-show of crime? Has wickedness triumphed over virtue, and has the author tried to make you glad of the fact? With the final impression of the play fresh upon your spirit, turn toward the pole-star of morals, — love of the greatest good for the greatest number, — and see whether it has been obscured. If it has, to that extent the play is immoral.

One of the first things to ask concerning a new play is whether or not it contains anything original. Are the incidents by which the theme is developed fresh or hackneyed? Are the lines bright or commonplace? If the drama be in verse, are there any passages that stand out as memorable poetry? And, if so, do they clog the dramatic movement, or are they natural portions of the action? Have the chief characters aroused your sympathy and personal interest? Has the inter-

est of curiosity been maintained without a break? Is the moral tone high, the lesson wholesome, the fun refined, the sentiment genuine, the action probable, the catastrophe convincing, the total impression pleasing, edifying, memorable? These and a score of similar questions may be used to measure the merits and faults of any drama.

Both in poetry and in the literary drama you will find some of the severest tests of your own critical discernment and some of the keenest and dearest pleasures that literature can afford.

XIV

THE OBJECT OF ART

In conclusion, let us focus all that has been said in the preceding chapters by getting a clear understanding of the true object of literary art. What is the central aim of all art, the main thing it seeks, the thing that justifies it and makes it live? Is its prime object to teach lessons? To preach goodness? To promulgate truth? To solve problems? To copy nature? To photograph life? To show how beautifully the artist can combine colors or the writer braid garlands of words? No, it is none of these, though there are mistaken people who imagine it to be one or more of them. These are all secondary objects of art, some of them essential means to an end; but not one of them is the chief end to be sought for its own sake.

The supreme object of the artist should be to convey to us, through the medium of imaginative illusion, a great idea, impression, or emotion. Whether the art-product be a story, a poem, a drama, a painting, a statue, a symphony, or an

opera, the idea at the heart of it is the vital thing, the soul of it, and the artist's mission is to express this idea as beautifully and impressively as possible. The novelist does it by creating an illusion of actual social life, — of persons and scenes, — a vision of reality so skillfully conjured that it stirs in us the emotions latent in reality itself. The greater the theme and the more perfect the art used in expressing it, the greater the novel will be, because the deeper will be its impression on the memory.

We may define the object of all art, then, as the perfect emotional expression of a beautiful idea.

Perfect technique, which creates the illusion, is the body of art, the form through which the idea, the soul, makes itself known to our hearts. The finest technique is dead unless it have a vital idea inside it, animating it, lending it a significance that touches us personally. We cannot afford to despise either the message or the language that embodies it; indeed, the beauty that is the essence of art may reside partly in both; only, one should not fall into the error of the "art for art's sake" fanatics, who place the vehicle above the message conveyed.

Sincerity, a quality growing out of the author's own personality, helps to put "feeling" into technique. Victor Hugo makes you feel the sincerity that lies back of both idea and treatment in "Les Misérables"; Dickens does the same in "Oliver Twist," Charles Reade in "The Cloister and the Hearth," Mr. Howells in "The Rise of Silas Lapham." Have you ever heard a violinist play a piece made up of the most difficult gymnastic feats, and play it with marvelous skill, too, yet without stirring a single responsive chord in your own emotions? The piece lacks a sincere emotional motive, and no brilliancy of execution can give it a soul that it never had.

Much of the literature of our time is deficient in this vital quality. Oscar Wilde's works may serve as an extreme illustration; even his "De Profundis" reveals in some degree his innate lack of deep sincerity. Maupassant was perhaps the greatest of all masters of the technique of the short story, but his brilliancy is without moral feeling, without wise human sympathy, hence without power to move us. Novelists have improved the form of the novel since the days of Thackeray and George Eliot, but they have not

improved upon the breadth and depth of the life portrayed; many have merely juggled with the surfaces of things, using words skillfully not so much for the expression of a great idea or emotion as for the concealment of its absence.

Beauty, the supreme quality of art, is a thing of a myriad forms and degrees, and taste is largely a matter of learning to judge these degrees correctly. To the uncultivated taste the insipid prettiness of a studio model's face, whether in a fashion-plate or in a novel by Mrs. Southworth, seems beautiful, though it is evident that such a head never ached with an idea. Beauty of the higher order has character back of it, shining out through it, giving depth of meaning to the face or to the story. Beauty often is hidden under outward aspects of ugliness. Beneath the crimes in "Othello" and "Faust" there is a majesty of thought that makes the flimsy-pretty romance of the hour look tame and small.

One mission of the novelist is to discover hidden aspects of beauty in life and reveal them to the world. Until Dickens revealed the artistic possibilities of the London slums nobody realized that there could be anything beautiful in the

denizens of those dirty back-alleys of life. As in the case of Millet's Barbizon peasants, it is the character, the pathos and humor and human nature, shining out through the soiled and seamy exterior, that lends attractive significance to a Captain Cuttle, a Sam Weller, a Mark Tapley.

One of the vital tests of literary beauty is its freedom from the vapid or vulgar — its quality of distinction. The masses of fiction-readers do not know this quality when they see it, nor miss it when it is absent. They are satisfied with commonplace thoughts and sentiments garnished with tinsel rhetoric; and that is what is the matter with many of our "best sellers." They represent the taste of the class that prefers "Mr. Barnes of New York" to "The Choir Invisible." Just above this stratum of readers is one that demands a certain distinction of technique, but that cannot tell brummagem from gold, being content with a writer who has nothing to say and many ingenious ways of saying it. Readers of this group prefer "Rulers of Kings" to "A Modern Instance." Finally, there are the discerning few who demand some distinction both of thought and of verbal artistry. They enjoy Meredith, Hardy, Steven-

son, Howells, Mrs. Humphry Ward, William De Morgan, Eden Phillpotts, Henry James, May Sinclair, Arnold Bennett. The books that live longest are most likely to be found among those that win the admiration of this class, and the distinction that marks them out for survival usually is that of a beautiful idea with some touch of originality both in itself and in its form of expression.

A good way to find the most vital and lasting element in any work of art is to note what you remember longest about it. If you have seen Saint-Gaudens's fine statue of Lincoln at the entrance to Lincoln Park, Chicago, the chances are that you cannot now describe the details of the pose, the cut of the hair, the way the folds of the coat hang; you cannot say whether the right foot or the left is advanced, or whether the body is slightly stooped or erect. All these were matters of importance to the sculptor, being part of his language for conveying the impression he sought; but these details, being but means to an end, we have forgotten. The thing that stays with us is the idea of Lincoln's noble, earnest, tender, brooding character — a great soul bowed with

an almost intolerable load of responsibility, yet bearing it with a solemn gladness because of an all-embracing love for his fellow men. The light of this idea shines from the strong, sad face, and speaks from every line of the tall, awkward, yet majestic figure. And because of the perfect sincerity of the artist and the perfect unity of his composition, this is the thing which, having once looked on that story in bronze, you never can forget.

It is many years since I have read "A Tale of Two Cities." I have forgotten every line of the dialogue. There is not a sentence of the whole book that I can recall verbatim. The details of the plot have grown dim or vanished from my mind, and some of the minor characters have faded into oblivion. But there still stands forth clearly in my memory the noble figure of Sydney Carton, and I see him most vividly in that great moment when he mounts the guillotine to give his life for another. The hero and his supreme act embody the great idea that inspired Dickens to write the book. To this he bent all his powers, subordinated all his other characters and scenes; and this is the vital thing that he has caused to live

longest in the memory. By his technical skill he has done it; by his mastery of the language of art, the deftness and naturalness of his dialogue, the unity of the dramatic action — by the high degree of artistic perfection, in short, with which he has made us feel the presence of a large soul in a frail human body. So it is Sydney Carton that makes us remember "A Tale of Two Cities" long after we have forgotten hundreds of the commonplace novels of the hour.

But without the author's art of choosing the one word that makes the picture real — that creates the illusion which is the essence of all literary art — Sydney Carton would have died unborn, and so would Lady Dedlock, Colonel Newcome, Harvey Birch, Di Vernon, Tess, Diana of the Crossways, John Silver, and all the rest of the living characters in literature. So there you have the three essentials of good art, — the idea worth expressing, the technique to express it beautifully, and the sincerity to express it convincingly.

If the main object of poetry were the rhythmical display of words in forms pleasing to the ear, Swinburne would be a greater poet than Shake-

speare. If the main object of fiction were the creation of clever dialogue, Anthony Hope and Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler would be greater novelists than Dickens. If brilliancy of style were more than imaginative creation, Maurice Hewlett would be above Sir Walter Scott. But the quest for greatness in literary art always brings us back to the idea for which all these things are merely the body and clothes. "Words without thought never to heaven go."

But you may be willing to give substance and form their respective dues and yet cling to the Puritan notion that a story should exist primarily to teach a moral or religious lesson. The Puritans have left some precious legacies, but their ideas of art are not among these. They destroyed statues and broke stained-glass windows, but created none. Their ideal of literary art was a sermon. The genius of Milton, indeed, with the aid of Satan by way of hero, did create a masterpiece in "Paradise Lost"; but the primary mission of art is to please, not to instruct, and the author of "Paradise Lost," happily for us, was thinking more about beauty than about doctrine when he penned his majestic poem.

The common ground on which Puritan and artist can stand together is this: that true beauty is in itself an inspiration to higher thinking and higher living. The foundations of all great literary art are set deep in the bed-rock of moral ideas, but the moment the poet or fiction-writer ceases trying to please he ceases to be an artist.

Another fallacy, the peculiar affliction of the ultra-realists, who are trying to get along without ideals, is the theory that the object of imaginative literature is to embody facts as they are. Truth of this kind is the concern of science, not of any form of art. The literally "true" parts of the story are apt to be its most unreal-seeming and therefore its weakest parts. An extremist, such as Zola, injures his work by trying to depict life just as it is, with emphasis on all its ugly, commonplace, dull, sordid details — the more offensive the more "realistic." A cross-section of life, even at its best, is not a work of art; it is only the raw material, the block of marble out of which the shapely statue must be carved with the aid of the constructive imagination; and when it is finished, it must have more beauty than

sordidness, give more pleasure than pain, otherwise it will be relegated to the dust-heap.

If an exact copying of life were the supreme object of art, a photograph of a hayfield at Barbizon would be greater than any painting by Millet or Rousseau, for the camera can give infinitely more truth of detail than an artist's brush. Mere imitation is not art. It is not art to paint a potato so realistically that the kitchen-maid tries to pick it up and peel it. Not delusion, but illusion, is the sign of true art. "This is illusion, and this is the painter's art," as Frederick W. Robertson has said: "never for one moment to deceive by attempted imitation, but to produce a mental state in which the feelings are suggested which the natural objects themselves would create." Sometimes an author produces this mental state by subtly suggesting the atmosphere of a whole country, as Henry B. Fuller does that of Italy in his charming story, "The Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani."

A wax figure in a dime museum may be posed so cleverly that the unsophisticated will inquire of it the way to the exhibit of the bearded lady. That is delusion. When you look at the Apollo

Belvedere you are not deceived for an instant into thinking it a real man. You feel that this marble is a great work of art, whereas the wax figure is merely a tawdry trick. The difference is that the Greek statue, by its beauty, by its power of artistic illusion, stirs our souls with memorable emotions, while the other does not.

In like manner the novelist's art requires something more than mere realistic similitude, something more than that the characters shall seem as real and humdrum as one's next door neighbors. There must be the artist's vision of a character or an act that stirs the heart in some worthy and memorable way. There must be, first, the living thought, emotion, or conviction in the author's mind, then the visualizing power of his imagination, warming it into life at the fires of his own heart, and shaping it into forms whose truth and beauty transmit his glowing idea to us as we read his pages.

All this is not to say that the Shakespeares and Goethes are the only authors worth reading. The little flowers of the field have their place in the world as well as the roses and passion-flowers. Criticism itself becomes worthless when it spends

all its time carping at the weeds and never sees the violets half hidden under their shadow.

The elder Dumas tells of a time when the entire audience in a Paris theatre consisted of one man. This man insisted that, as he had paid for his ticket, the play should be performed for him — and then he hissed it. But in doing so he defeated himself. The manager sent for a police officer, who, with the excuse that the hisser disturbed the performance, put him out on the street. This little book will have failed sadly in its aim if it causes any reader to shut himself out of any part of the great theatre of literature by hissing everything. True criticism does not scorn the little beauties, the humbler sincerities of art. There is many a book of moderate merits and imperfect workmanship that still has some originality of character, some wholesomeness of spirit, some touch of beauty to justify its brief existence. The true object of criticism is not to find faults for their own sake, but to distinguish beauties, large and small, and enjoy them; in other words, to make the best investment of one's reading hours.

The more of the higher, enduring qualities a book possesses, the richer the reward it offers. If

the absolutely best does not suit your taste or mood, never mind, but choose habitually the relatively best in which you can find genuine enjoyment. That way lie the more imperishable joys of the enchanted land of letters.

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